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Vasco da Gama 1497.
Suez Canal Route 1869:
Air Route



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Arabian Sea.

The
Third Route





Philip Acton Brooke

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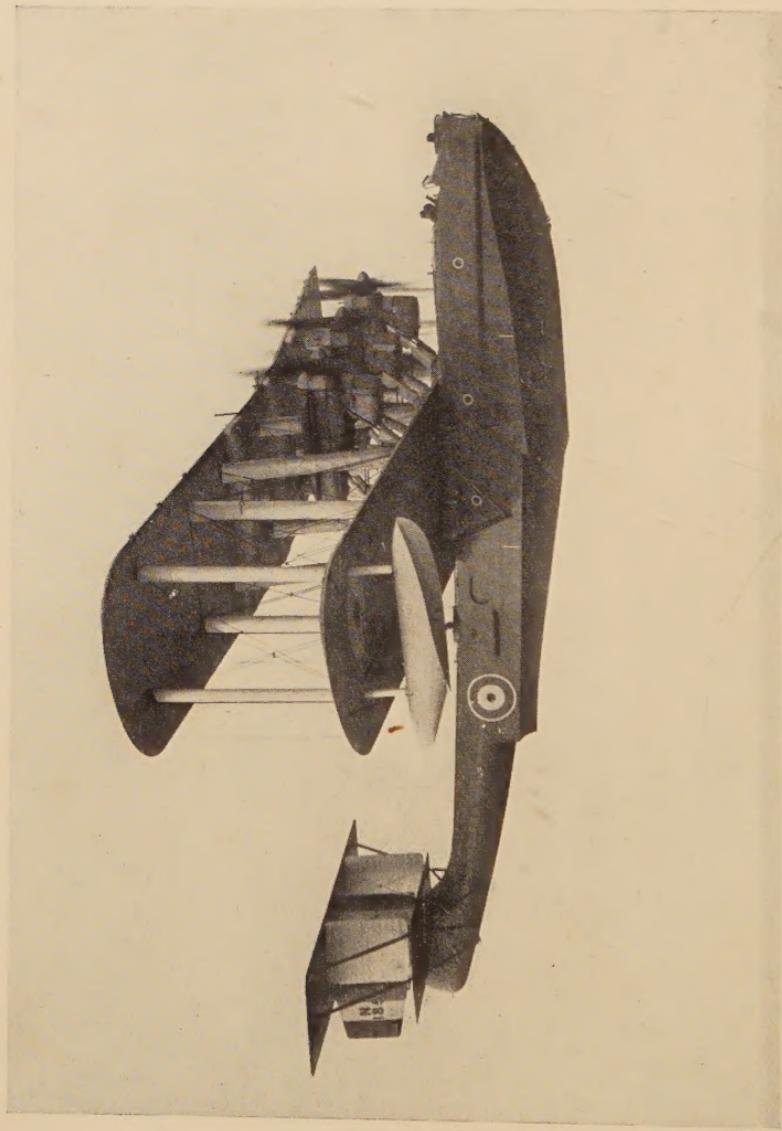
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THE THIRD ROUTE



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Flying Boat—Iris II.



THE THIRD ROUTE

By

PHILIP SASSOON

ὡς κραιπνῶς μεμαυῖα διεπτᾶτο ὡκέα Ἰρις



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I

THE CRUISE AND ITS PURPOSE

“ And I finally concluded that if I did not fly thither (to India) it was impossible to make the journey.”

Pero Tafur; 1435.

THE THIRD ROUTE

CHAPTER I

THE CRUISE AND ITS PURPOSE

THIS is the story of the Third Route which has already brought India within five days of London and will shortly be traversed backward and forward by a steady stream of traffic; until the Air Way to the East is as well known as and little less frequented than the Great North Road.

I make no claim to be a pioneer. Sir Samuel and Lady Maud Hoare and others have traversed the same route, or most of it, before me. There is no longer anything very remarkable in the mere achievement of travelling to India and back by air. It will very soon cease to be worth writing about, and will become an ordinary commonplace thing, like so many other of the wonders of our day. Yet, while that stage has still to be attained, it may perhaps help to bring it nearer and to make the possibilities of air travel more widely known and better understood, if I give an account of my

own experiences on my recent tour and of the impressions they have left upon me.

When Ross Smith and Keith Smith first flew from England to Australia they were pioneers in the true sense. Their splendid, unprecedented feat marked the commencement of a new epoch in the history of communication between Western Europe and the East. The chapter which Vasco da Gama opened, when he rounded the southernmost point of Africa and brought the Western European nations for the first time into direct communication with India and the East, closed when the genius of de Lesseps translated into reality the dream of the Pharaohs. Now a third chapter has begun with the demonstration of a Third Route to India and beyond, infinitely more direct than the first, still more direct and far swifter than the second, the way of the bird through the air.

When this book appears in print, Imperial Airways will already have opened a regular service of aeroplanes and flying boats between London and India. It was, no doubt, thought to be only right that before this civil service was inaugurated over the new route to the East, a route which means so much to the British Empire, a Royal Air Force machine should fly the course. Upon me, as Under-

CRUISE AND ITS PURPOSE 5

Secretary of State for Air, fell the good fortune to be selected to accompany it and to carry out the first general inspection of British overseas air stations to be undertaken entirely by air transport.

I had the great advantage over the early pioneers that, since they first blazed the air trail to the East, the peculiar qualities of the flying boat have come to be better known and more fully developed. It was in one of the latest of this most useful type of machine that the main stages of my journey were to be covered ; land machines being reserved for their legitimate purpose of land transport, conveying me and my party on the long overland journeys involved by my programme of visits.

These visits furnished the main purpose of my journey ; but it was expected also to obtain from it further experience of the behaviour of large metal-hulled flying boats in tropical and sub-tropical waters. The days which I should spend in visiting units in Egypt and India would give opportunity for certain experiments to be carried out by the flying boat, which would be of use both to the Royal Air Force and to the development of a civil flying boat service over the Third Route. The journey was to be essentially a

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test of the behaviour of a large flying boat in Eastern waters under normal flying conditions. The official preparations, therefore, were not elaborate. They consisted chiefly in the drawing up of an itinerary to which it should be possible to adhere without undue difficulty, the obtaining of necessary permits for flying over foreign countries and the notification to the officers in charge of the different air ports at which we proposed to call of the dates when we expected to arrive, so that they might be prepared to receive us.

The tour had to be carried out in quick time, in order that I might be back in London for the opening of Parliament ; but there was to be no attempt at record breaking, or to cover stages of more than ordinary length without a stop. The keeping of our schedule was to be our primary flying objective, and the stages of our itinerary were arranged to that end. Leaving Cattewater, the Royal Air Force seaplane base in Plymouth Sound, on the morning of the 29th September, 1928, in the Iris II flying boat, we were to cross direct to France and then follow the French coast to the Etang d'Hourtin, our first stopping place. After refuelling at the French seaplane base there, we were to fly the same day to the Etang de Berre on the Mediterranean close to Marseilles, where we

were to spend the night. Next day we were to fly to Naples for the night, then on to Athens for the night of the 1st October. On the 2nd October we were due to reach Cairo, where my official duties proper would commence. At Cairo I would leave the Iris which would conduct experimental cruises in the Eastern Mediterranean and cross to the Persian Gulf by way of Alexandretta and the Euphrates and Tigris rivers ; while I was to be taken on land machines, furnished by the Middle East Command, on my round of visits in Egypt and the Sudan.

After spending a week on these duties, I was to leave Cairo by land machine on the 10th October and fly over Palestine and the Syrian Desert to Iraq, arriving at Baghdad on the 11th October. Part of my inspections in Iraq were to be carried out on my return journey, so on the 12th October I would leave Baghdad for Basra and on the 13th go on via Henjam Island to Karachi which I was due to reach on the 14th October, sixteen days after leaving England. Not remarkably rapid, certainly, if it had been a direct journey to India ; but I should have accomplished a great deal on the way.

I was to spend eight days in visiting the Air Force stations in India, including two days at Simla where I was to be the guest of the

Viceroy. After a complete round of our units on the North-West Frontier, I would leave Karachi on the 24th October on my return journey. I should be due at Baghdad again on the 26th October. A couple of days would be occupied in completing my inspection of our air stations in Iraq, including a visit to Mosul, and I should reach Cairo once more by the end of the month. From Cairo my course would lie along the northern coast of Africa to Benghazi, in Italian Cyrenaica, whence we would strike across the sea to Malta for the final inspection of my tour. From Malta I would return on the 3rd November by way of Naples and Marseilles to Cattewater which I was due to reach on the 6th November.

This programme, in the course of which I was to cover, digressions apart, some 16,700 miles in less than six weeks, was not in fact kept, as will be seen, without some variation ; but the variations, while supplying incident, did not affect the general scheme of my tour or detract from its success.

Though the official preparations were comparatively simple, a journey which in so short a space of time was to traverse so many different countries, sample so many various climates and involve calling upon so many different people of all degrees of official importance, was

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not one to be undertaken without a good deal of personal preparation. This reflected itself in the extent and weight of my private baggage. I had to take clothes suitable for all weathers and for all occasions, tropical and semi-arctic, ceremonial and very definitely informal. The ordinary civilian who travels by air on business or pleasure will be spared the ceremonial part ; but he should certainly be prepared for wide changes of temperature. He should remember that he will be travelling at great speed and will pass from one climate to another in the course of a few days, or even hours. More than that, he will often fly high, and even in tropical latitudes the air at a few thousand feet can be very cold.

No special preparation was required in the case of the machine itself, seeing that it was designed from the first for long cruises and was intended to provide a home for its crew, as well as a means of transport. The roomy interior of the fuselage was fitted up with four bunks and contained, in addition to fixed tables and seats for the navigator and wireless operator, a folding table which could be moved about and a couple of chairs. There was also a food chest, an apparatus for boiling water and for other small cooking operations, and a wash basin. So we were really very adequately pro-

vided for. As regards flying clothes : I wore during the whole trip, when flying, a thin cotton overall above ordinary civilian clothes and a cotton flying cap. I had an overcoat with me for use when flying in an open machine ; but found that I had always left it behind when I wanted it most.

Let me give a brief description (easily skipped by those who are not interested) of the specifications of the splendid vessel which was to carry me in safety and comfort on so long a journey, and add to it short particulars of the land machines which I used over the land portions of my tour. The Iris II is one of the latest and largest of the flying boats of the Royal Air Force. It is a biplane built by the Blackburn Aeroplane & Motor Co. Ltd. with a span of 95 feet and an all-metal hull which is proof against saturation by water ; so that the weight of the hull does not increase, as is the case with wooden hulled boats, during the progress of a cruise. It is driven through the air by three Rolls-Royce Condor engines, developing a total of 2,100 h.p., at a cruising speed of some 87 knots, or 100 miles per hour, and carries 900 gallons of petrol, which are sufficient for a range of approximately 900 miles. It carries normally a crew of eight, who can sleep and feed on board,

CRUISE AND ITS PURPOSE II

and is provided with a light dinghy which is bolted upside down on to the lower centre section. When complete with full Service equipment, the Iris weighs over 12 tons. On this occasion it was called upon to carry nine persons and luggage, with the result that it took the air at something over 14 tons.

In Egypt I was provided with a Fairey III.F. day bomber, and on my journey to Khartum was accompanied by two other machines of the same type. The Fairey III.F. is a two or three seater with a 500 h.p. Napier Lion engine, and has an endurance of five hours at a cruising speed of 110 m.p.h. I was to have travelled from Egypt to Iraq in a Vickers Victoria troop carrier, a similar machine to those which have recently done such splendid work in rescuing the European women and children in Kabul ; but at the time when I was due to leave Cairo a flight of Westland "Wapitis" was in course of delivery to our air forces in Iraq, so I travelled in one of these machines. The Wapiti, an admirable general purpose machine, has a Jupiter VI engine and a cruising speed of 120 m.p.h. It has absolutely no protection in the back seat and, travelling at such a speed, I found it somewhat draughty. In India I used a Hinaidi, D.H.9a's and Bristols. The D.H.9a is a general purpose machine, and the Bristol

a two-seater fighter, now chiefly used for Army co-operation work, and their performances are well known. The Hinaiidi is a Handley-Page bomber with two 475 h.p. geared Jupiter engines and a cruising speed of 90 m.p.h. It carried round the North-West Frontier of India two pilots, two crew, two or three passengers, plus their baggage, and fuel for eight or nine hours' flying.

I was to be accompanied throughout my journey by Air Commodore A. M. Longmore, Director of Equipment. The two pilots of the Iris were Squadron Leader C. L. Scott, commanding the Flying Boat Development Flight at Felixstowe, and Flight Lieutenant L. Martin, of the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment, Felixstowe. All three were chosen with a view to their being able to discuss and report upon the various special problems with which our overseas Air Stations have to contend, and no one could wish for more delightful companions upon such a tour.

As soon as it was decided that I was to go upon the tour, I began to look forward to it eagerly, yet with mixed feelings. I had done a good deal of flying, both at home, in America, in France and in Italy; but I had never undertaken so long a voyage by air, nor had I had any previous experience of these huge flying

boats. I was uncertain how I should stand the strain of constant flying, interspersed with a series of strenuous inspections in hot climates, and I was fully prepared to find myself thoroughly weary long before I got back home. As the glorious summer of 1928 wore on and the golden days of August and September succeeded each other, I began to feel that such weather could not last and that, before the date of my departure came, it would surely break up. It did, and so did my health. The first taste of our traditional English weather brought with it an influenza cold, and I left Paddington at 10 p.m. on the 28th September with incipient croup and a raging fever. The despondency natural to my condition was increased when I heard that the Southampton-Guernsey service had been stopped that day by rain and fog.

It was a miserably slow and bumpy journey to Plymouth. We seemed to be perpetually shunting, and sleep was impossible. When I left the train at 3.45 a.m. at Plymouth Town Station to wait, on a draughty platform amid the clanking of milk cans and the presage of a bad day, for another train to take me to the harbour, my temperature rose and my spirits sank. At the harbour we were met by Wing Commander Huskinson and a motor-boat, embarked in the chill darkness, and were taken to

the seaplane base at Cattewater. There I changed and washed, breakfasted, interviewed sundry reporters who looked, and probably felt, almost as cold and cheerless as myself, was photographed by flashlight by way of crowning horror, asked anxiously for weather reports, and then got on board the motor-boat once more to be taken to the Iris.

She could be seen dimly in the distance against the background of a sulky dawn; a great, grey, graceful shape riding lightly on the leaden waters, the embodiment of power and speed. For the first time since I had left London I began to feel a real interest in my coming journey.

II
EASTWARD HO !

“ Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off ! ”

CHAPTER II

EASTWARD HO!

THERE was sufficient wind to make the sea choppy, but not enough to clear the fog or to give much assistance in the "take off." By 6.45 a.m. we were all aboard the Iris and settled in. We donned our Perrin lifebelts and Read Kapok jackets and the three Rolls engines were started up, their steady roar adding immeasurably to the sense of power which the lines of the flying boat had called up at my first view of her.

We were all rather doubtful whether, with our heavy load and the light wind, we should be able to take off without some trouble and we taxied to the end of the harbour to get a longer run. Once, however, the good ship Iris had her nose set into whatever breeze there was, she rose swiftly and eagerly from the water. We were started on our adventure.

A turn round the harbour brought us to a height of about 500 feet. Plymouth, that has played so large a part in the history of British sea power, was spread out before us on its tumbling hillsides, looking still and but half-

wakened in the cold, grey dawn. It seemed wholly unconscious of the fact that a new step in the development of British power was taking place before its eyes ; but perhaps the inhabitants of Plymouth were more accustomed to seeing seaplanes than I was to travelling in them. Yet I could pick out Drake's statue on The Hoe and sense the inspiration that it must ever have for all our island people. We passed over Drake's Island and got a view past Devonport up the Hamoaze, with its dockyards and lines of great moored ships, to Saltash. Then we swung across the long line of the breakwater and passed the dark mass of Rame Head, and at a speed of 85 miles laid our course due South into the rain and mist for France.

Fog and low clouds kept us at first close to the water, till we seemed at times almost to be skimming it. We flew by the Eddystone within six minutes of starting and later tried to get above the clouds. This we eventually succeeded in doing ; though it was not easy, owing to the varying heights of the fog banks. To one new to this mode of travel, it was all very exciting and enjoyable. Now that we were really under weigh my spirits steadily rose and I forgot all about my cold. When I again remembered it, it had completely disappeared.

Suddenly, in a vignette of sunshine far away

to our left, we caught sight through the haze of the dark outline of Guernsey lying low upon the waters. A little later, after passing some bad patches of fog, we got our first glimpse of the coast of France. As we drew nearer land the mist cleared. Soon after passing Ushant we found ourselves roaring South-East along the coast of Brittany in brilliant sunshine against a strong, but perfectly steady wind. Seen from above as we saw it, and with one's only sense of motion that of a glorious, swift rushing through the air, it is a lovely indented coast ; with waves dashing themselves to atoms against black walls of rock and the sea covered with archipelagos of small sailing boats. We passed Belle Ile, the tomb of that stout-armed and simple-hearted musketeer, M. Porthos du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds. Rather a large island it seemed, full of smart little grey and white houses, and fringed with exquisite blue-green coves. The strong head wind was somewhat delaying our progress which up till then had been very rapid ; but, even so, before 11 a.m. we had reached La Rochelle, with its memories of religious strife. Less than two hours later we were approaching the Etang d'Hourtin.

So far, it had been a wonderfully comfortable journey and the Bay of Biscay was robbed

entirely of its terrors. No doubt, a real gale would have made itself felt in the air as well as on sea ; but the wind we were encountering was quite enough to give an uncomfortable dusting to surface vessels, while we sped steadily and evenly on our way. It was a revelation of the advantages of travelling by air, when stretches of open sea have to be crossed. I was to find out very shortly that flying over an uneven land surface can be a slightly different story. I was agreeably surprised, too, to discover that the noise was far less objectionable than I had expected to find it. The three great engines were lifted so far above the roofed-in fuselage that the noise and vibration from them were largely dispersed or absorbed before reaching us. On the other hand, the big cabin-like interior of the flying boat, with ample room to move about or lie down and sleep if one were so disposed, enabled one to make oneself thoroughly at home and comfortable. It was a great boon, too, to be able to get hot food and drink, and to smoke without anxiety or risk of fire. I began to realise that I was going to find the trip a good deal less tiring than I had supposed, and it had already proved itself to be an unrivalled cure for colds.

Just before reaching Hourtin we had an excellent early lunch, completed with hot coffee

provided by a very useful "Primus" stove. Then our attention was called to the delightful scene that met us, as we swung over the immense belts of pine woods which have transformed the sand wastes of the "Landes" into a profitable national forest, giving regular annual harvests of timber and resin. Right ahead of us the coast stretched out like a long tricolour ribbon, the straight line of green pines, gleaming white sand and blue sea fading and blending together in the far distance.

The Etang d'Hourtin is the most northerly of the chain of lagoons which lie just inshore along the coast from Biarritz to the mouth of the Gironde. We glided down to the calm waters of the lake which lay so snug in its sheltering pinewoods, scaring the wild boars which people the silent glades, and alighted as quietly and easily as one of the wild duck which we could hear squattering and talking among the reeds. The lake is rather shallow for a boat of the size of the Iris and we ran aground more than once, as we taxied towards the hangars of the French seaplane station. However, the soft mud neither delayed us long nor did us any harm, and in due course the Iris was made fast. Longmore and I went on shore to stretch our legs, while the ship was being re-fuelled, and were welcomed with every kindness and

courtesy by the French commandant and officers in charge. We were not a little flattered to notice how great an interest they took in our boat.

The station is now used purely as a school ; but the personnel were quite ready to receive us and they soon had two boats out beside the Iris full of drums of petrol. Meanwhile, our mechanics had rigged the re-fuelling pump and in little over an hour we had taken in 450 gallons and were ready to resume our journey.

It was a change in every respect from our morning's flight. Our course lay from sea to sea over 250 miles of land between the Atlantic and Mediterranean seabards of the Midi. We followed the course of the Gironde and Garonne rivers and the Canal du Midi, none of them able to show more than a very few places where a boat of our size and weight could have landed safely. All that they did was to give one a nice, damp feeling ; but with our three Condors singing in perfect unison we had no qualms on that score.

Some of us began to experience qualms of a different nature. The irregularities of the land surface and the differences of radiation, under the hot sun, from hillside and river valley, combined with the broken gusts of wind which came across the Pyrenees to impart a more

lively motion to the Iris. It was as if she realised that she had been taken from her natural element and resented it. I for one bitterly regretted the enormous wad of chocolate cake which, under the influence of a sea appetite, I had swallowed like a pill before restarting ; for it was now adding considerably to my disquiet. Yet the wonderful view of the fertile land of France, with the long line of the Pyrenees rising like a mighty wall on our right, was more than enough to make up for a little physical discomfort. Every few minutes some object of fresh interest came within our sight. We passed over Toulouse, with its three bridges and the Cathedral Church of St. Sernin, Mother of the French Romanesque School of Architecture. The Cathedral stood out nobly above the narrow, twisted streets of the city, and we could see its brick arcades and towers glowing a rosy pink in the afternoon sun.

Soon after, we were passing over the mediæval battlements, so brilliantly restored by Viollet-le-Duc, of Carcassonne, with its memories of the Visigoths and the Black Prince. We were flying high, and the whole countryside lay under us biscuit-coloured from the long summer drought, right up to the tree-clad foothills of the Pyrenees. We reached the Mediterranean at Cette and, as if she knew that she was once

more flying over the element for which she was designed, the Iris steadied herself and the rest of our journey was accomplished in delightful calm. It was indeed almost too calm, for there were patches of fog above which we had to climb. We followed the line of the coast, here low-lying and set with salt-water lagoons. It is a desolate-looking country, where they breed the bulls which still on occasion wake to life the great stone tiers and corridors of the Roman amphitheatre at Nîmes. Now, flying low again, we could see the 13th century ramparts of Aigues-Mortes, standing four-square with their gates and corner towers, and looking very real after the bombast of Carcassonne. Along the shores of the lagoons were piled neat little pyramids of white salt, seeming as though they still covered the bodies of slaughtered Burgundians. Next came Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer and more small mountains of future Cerebos, standing out in the evening light as pure as the sainted ladies who there found refuge from persecution.

Dusk was fast thrusting itself upon our attention and we began to realise that, if we were to reach the Etang de Berre before dark, it would be a near thing and we should be lucky. The fog began to gather again, and we wondered if we might not have to come down before we

had reached our destination and spend the night on the open sea. The chance involved no more than a matter of convenience, for a calm night at sea in the Iris would have been no hardship, nor would it have been accompanied by any danger. It was the thought of the attractions of the Marseilles hotels, rather than any sense of risk, that exercised our minds.

Our luck held. We ran out of the fog and slid down on to the surface of the great lagoon just as the light was failing. Berre is an ideal place for a seaplane base ; an enormous inland salt-water lake, so sheltered from the sea and winds that it is never too rough for taking off or landing, and within convenient reach of the great city and port of Marseilles. We were again the centre of much interest, and once more most hospitably received by a number of French officers.

At the hotel we were joined by my friend Sir Louis Mallet who had come over to meet me from Grasse, and could with difficulty be dissuaded from joining the Iris as a stowaway on the following morning. Already, I had much to tell him ; and the enthusiasm of my description of our flight may perhaps have been largely responsible for his eagerness to join us, by fair means or foul.

It had been a long day of twelve hours' flying with, at any rate for a novice, a certain amount of anxiety at the start and at the finish ; not anxiety for our personal safety, but for the completion of our journey in accordance with our time-table. Twelve hours' journey by train and steamer, with the rush of changing from one means of conveyance to another and the long periods of enforced idleness in the confined space of a railway carriage, would have brought me to my journey's end tired in body and mind. At the close of my long day in the air I felt not a bit tired. On the contrary, I was very fit : much fitter, indeed, than when I started. No doubt the novelty of the experience and the intense interest of all that I had seen had much to do with my condition. Yet already I had made up my mind that travelling by flying boat was a thoroughly enjoyable method of seeing the world. I felt that my tour had begun well.

III

OLD ACQUAINTANCES

“Naples floating in her sequined sea
Wearing the fiery feather in her cap.”

CHAPTER III

OLD ACQUAINTANCES

IN kindly accord with my very cheerful outlook, the second day of my tour was marked from the start by delightful weather. We took off quickly and easily in bright sunshine which soon cleared the morning mist and, cutting across the heights which shelter the lake from the sea, passed over Marseilles harbour and along the coast to Toulon and Hyères.

The great overhead gantry bridge which spans the entrance to the old port, and is so conspicuous an object to those travelling by steamer to or from Marseilles, had lost all its overpowering height and lay dwarfed beneath us ; but the golden statue of the Virgin on Notre-Dame de la Garde shone out boldly in the sunlight, seeming to speed us on our way. Steam was rising from the boats of the Messageries Maritimes in the sheltered harbour of la Ciotat, and the villages and bays of this lesser known part of the Riviera, Bandol and Ollioules-Sanary, looked delightfully gay and inviting under smiling hills carpeted with immortelles.

We broke away from the coast at Hyères. Flying over the beautiful islands of Porquerolles and Port Cros, we left behind us the mass of crystalline schist which forms the wild Pays des Maures ; a fitting theatre, with its steep mountain sides and dense forests of pine and cork trees, for the last stronghold of Africa in Europe. Heading due East for Italy, we had a freshening wind from the South-West to help us and made good progress.

Soon after mid-day we sighted the peak of Mt. Rotondo, rising nearly 9,000 feet from the centre of Corsica, and less than an hour later were passing over Cape Corse. We were still some distance from the main island ; but near enough at the height at which we were flying to get a good view of the picturesque savagery of the island scenery, the distance hiding all trace of cultivation and leaving nothing but a sea-framed picture of wild mountain and scrub. We paid toll for our view when, to leeward of the island, we entered the area of broken wind currents which blew off the mountains. It became rather bumpy ; but I had found my air legs and ate a hearty lunch with unabated appetite. However, I combined courage with discretion, and this time drew the line at chocolate cake.

Then came Elba. As at Belle Ile, I was sur-

prised to find the island so large ; another example of the deceptiveness of small scale maps. Though not the largest, it must have been easily the most comfortable of Napoleon's three islands. We were now heading South-East along the western seaboard of Italy itself. It was a coast already well-known to me from the air ; for I had flown down it four times that very spring, to Naples and other places, with General de Pinedo, the great air-navigator, and Major de Bernardi of Schneider Cup fame. We passed over Ostia, and could see the smoke and domes of Rome in the distance over the sunlit Campagna and against the background of the Apennines, already snow-capped. It was rather pleasing to realise that the Eternal City could put up a quite presentable smoke cloud in September ; while poor old foggy London was still bright under autumn skies.

It was about this time that I found that I had a more personal reason for self-congratulation. My air-seasoned companion, Longmore, suddenly collapsed with an appalling sick headache and took no further interest in the scenery, or anything else, till we reached Naples. It was most unfortunate and also rather curious ; for later on in our trip, when flying over the sun-scorched deserts of India, we met with far worse conditions which tried me sorely, but in

which Longmore did not turn a hair. Several ships were working along the coast and we flew down low and signalled ; but never a sign of life was there on board. They seemed, like the ship in the Ancient Mariner, to be navigating themselves.

As I have said, I had seen Naples from the air before ; but, when we arrived over Ischia, the beautiful city in its surroundings of mountain, sea and island, was looking its very best. The waters of the glorious bay were so blue that they almost seemed unreal. Over Vesuvius curled and floated a great white ostrich feather of smoke and steam, and to the South of us the charming profile of Capri lay half veiled in cloud. It was a thousand pities that Longmore could not share my delight with me ; but at that moment the time-honoured phrase “ See Naples and die ” had assumed for him a new and grimmer meaning.

We were met at the seaplane station of Nisida by my opposite number, General Balbo, the Italian Under Secretary of State for Air, and by the Marquis de Pinedo, both old friends of mine, as well as by a number of other Italian officers, several of whom I knew. I had not forgotten the many kindnesses I had received from them when I visited Italy for the Schneider Cup race, and it seemed that they had not for-

gotten me. It was very jolly to receive so warm a welcome from so many old acquaintances ; all of them men who had already made their mark in Italian aviation. Many of them, like General de Pinedo to whom the flight upon which I was engaged must have seemed a very small affair after his flying boat cruise round the world, were men whose names are famous in aviation circles all the world over.

We got on shore just after 4 p.m., and General Balbo drove us into Naples in his car at a breakneck speed which alarmed me far more than anything I had experienced on my journey to Italy. I was made to realise why the Italians are such dangerous competitors for the Schneider race. Arrived at our hotel in Naples, and having taken temporary farewell of General Balbo, I went off to see the world-famous Aquarium and compare it with our own aquarium at the Zoo. The Naples aquarium is not very big, but it is excellently well arranged. The milder climate makes the housing of tropical and sub-tropical varieties easier than with us, and there are tanks of gelatinous fish which have solved H. G. Wells's problem of "The Invisible Man" and can only be seen when food is passing down their gullets.

Before dinner General Balbo presented me in the name of Italian aviation with a beautiful

silver flying trophy, executed with the art for which Italy is famous and on so magnificent a scale that I dared not add it to my luggage. It travelled home independently and now adds charm to the room in which I work in London. I accepted it as a very graceful tribute to British aviation from those who were our comrades in the Great War, and have since competed with us so keenly and with such good sportsmanship in the development of flying. It pleased me to regard it also as a very kindly, if undeserved, compliment to myself.

General Balbo's kindness and hospitality did not end there, for he entertained us all to dinner. Unfortunately, he himself was suffering, as he explained, from a "raffreddore di stomaco" and could only eat a Turkish curry which consisted of boiled rice and green lemons. He declared that it was a sovereign remedy for internal disorders. I urged Longmore to try it; but he hastily declared that he was fully recovered. General Balbo's own indisposition did not prevent him from showing himself the delightful host he always is, or from taking his full share in adding interest to a most enjoyable evening. Under Mussolini, no man in Italy has done more than he to develop Italy's air-mindedness, or to bring the Italian Air Force to the high degree of excellence it has attained.

Italian and British military air problems have many points of likeness, and Italy has adopted a system of military air organisation which is also very similar to our own. She has had for some years past a separate Department for Air and an independent Air Force with its own Minister, as we have. There are, therefore, always many points of common interest and like experience for us to discuss.

Italian civil air problems are at present not so similar to ours ; for her oversea possessions are not so far distant, and at home she has a special problem of her own to which as yet we have no parallel. The political centre of Italy at Rome, half-way down the peninsula, is a very long way removed from the industrial centre in the North, and her road and railway communications are not on a level with those of more compact England. There is a great need for better and speedier means of communication between the Italian industrial and political centres, and a correspondingly favourable opportunity for the development of civil air transport.

The leaders of Italian aviation are fully alive to the possibilities of the situation and, backed by the well-known engineering skill of their countrymen, are doing their best, not only to provide the machines, but to educate their fellow citizens to use them. The people of

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Italy, placed as they are, cannot really help but become air-minded, and they have made great progress already. The long sea coasts of Italy and the comparatively short sea passages to her African possessions seem to call urgently for flying boats. I was the more interested to learn that General Balbo was leaving next morning for Tripoli in a Dornier Super-Wal flying boat with eighteen other passengers. As usual, he was setting a good example.

IV

ATHENS

“ But a better land is there
Where Olympus cleaves the air.
The high still dell, where the Muses dwell,
Fairest of all things fair.”

Euripides.

CHAPTER IV

ATHENS

WE said farewell to General Balbo and to our other good friends early next morning, and were on board the Iris by 9 a.m., ready to start on what was to prove in many respects the most delightful, if not the most interesting, stage of my journey to India.

There was a goodish lop on Nisida Bay and, with 200 extra gallons of fuel on board, it took us a little time to get off the water. Once aloft we had no further trouble. We circled round the bay of Naples and took some photographs, passing quite close to Capri before we turned South-East. We got good views, too, of the cone and crater of Vesuvius, and flew over Pompeii which well repays a visit from the air. The whole plan of the Roman town can be seen clearly, and the Amphitheatre, as might be expected, forms a conspicuous feature of it. The lines of streets and houses look so complete and regular that very little imagination is needed to carry one's mind back to the days when the street corners re-echoed to the election cries which are still posted on the walls and the

benches of the Amphitheatre were thronged with crowds of Roman sightseers. I was the more sorry that I had no opportunity to examine the town again on foot. It would have been particularly interesting after so fine a bird's-eye view ; but one cannot have everything, or at any rate not everything at the same time.

Some Italian military seaplanes escorted us for part of our way down the Italian coast, flitting round the great flying boat like swallows round an eagle, and seeing us safely past Sorrento and the Sirens. They made an exceedingly pretty sight and gave one an admirable idea of the efficiency of the Service to which they belonged.

I was now once more seeing what was to me entirely new ground, and our long trip down the coasts of Campania and Calabria was full of interest. The continuous line of mountains which form the shank-bone of the leg of Italy rose high on our left and astonishingly close to us, their spurs and valleys running down to the blue waters of the Mediterranean in a delightful succession of headlands, capes and bays. As we drew near the foot we sighted Stromboli in the far distance to our right ; a perfect volcanic mountain cone, rising in isolated grandeur out of the sea and capped by a plume of slowly drifting smoke. Far off as it was, the



CRATER OF VESUVIUS.

mountain gave us a few kicks as we turned East to cross the foot of Italy at its narrowest part, just at the inception of the toe. We were now flying high, so as to be able to pass over a great block of mountains, and, as we swept across, could see the sea lapping up to it on either side. The weather was perfect, brilliant sun and brilliant blue sea, and the little Calabrian villages nestling under the hills looked altogether charming.

A few minutes later we were over the sea again and dropped to 2,000 feet across the Gulf of Squillace, the waters of which were so clear that at this height we could see the bottom quite easily. Scott set our course to make the Greek Islands just North of Cape Argostoli, on Zante, and we sped on due East across the Ionian Sea till we were out of sight of land. Our position, when we had left the last faint outline of Italy behind and sea and sky met in an unbroken horizon all around us, became quite wonderful. We found ourselves suspended in utter isolation between an unflecked sky and an unflecked sea, blue reflecting and intensifying blue. We spun along as though cupped between two azure cymbals, resonant with sound which seemed of deeper meaning than the roaring of man-made engines.

I shall never forget the first sight of Cephalonia

and Zante, etched in ivory upon the horizon. I see that Arthur Longmore's diary chronicles at this point that we had "just had a very excellent lunch of cold chicken, cheese and a pear." It is possible that we did ; but humiliating to think of in retrospect. The beauty of the scene should have satisfied our every appetite. Scott had allowed rather too much for drift and we entered the islands a little South of our intended course, so that Ithaca lay to our left, half-sheltered by Cephalonia. It was a good piece of navigation, all the same. We swung up into the Gulf of Patras, past Missolonghi where was sown the seed which blossomed into a free Greece, and entered the Gulf of Corinth.

At this point even Longmore felt constrained to abandon for a time his gastronomical register ; in order to watch the story of ancient Greece unfolding itself before our eyes beneath us. On our right rose in rugged peaks the mountains of Achaia, which sheltered the twelve towns and bred the warlike race that lent its name to all the peoples of Greece. On our left lay Delphi, set like a jewel in the crescent of the hills, with the heights of Parnassus and Helicon beyond. Everything breathed the spirit of classical romance and was bathed in the most exquisite light ; the sea as blue as a gentian

and clear as a diamond ; the hillsides green with pines or grey with olives, their lower slopes terraced with vineyards.

“The groves of olive scattered dark and wide,
Where meek Cephissus pours his scanty tide.”

At Corinth the destruction caused by the recent earthquake was painfully plain to see. The whole town lay a deserted, tumbled mass of ruins, at the end of the deep ditch which the canal across the Isthmus most resembles from the air. We turned into the northern end of the Gulf of Ægina and made for Salamis, thoughts of Themistocles mingling with recollections of Mahan, and dropped down towards Athens.

To arrive at Athens in such weather, by such means, and under such conditions, to fly over Salamis and see for the first time the great, grey city spilling itself over the vast plain, the wonderful outline of the Acropolis lifted in time-defying majesty above the roof-tops of the modern capital, with Hymettus in the background, was an experience which will always live in my memory, one which might have stirred the emotions of Zeno of Citium himself.

We land in Phaleron Bay, after covering 520 sea miles in $5\frac{3}{4}$ hours from Naples, and, with a strange sense that we have seen it all

before, are rowed ashore at Piræus. There we were met by Wing Commander Edmonds, in charge of the British R.A.F. mission, and by representatives of the Greek Navy. It was distinctly pleasant to encounter some of our own people, and to hear from them an account of the work they are doing to assist our friends the Greeks in the organisation of their air forces. Edmonds, indeed, made our way very easy for us ; but we had good reason to be most grateful, too, for the kindness shown to us by the Greek Government and the Greek officers detailed to attend to us. All arrangements were made to make our short stay comfortable, and to provide us and our machine with all that we needed.

As soon as we had found our quarters, I lost no time in going to the Acropolis, admiring as I went the Temple of Jupiter, the Arch of Hadrian and the Monument of Lysicrates, where Byron wrote. The Museum of the Acropolis is full of archaic objects of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., very beautiful and interesting ; statues of priestesses in cylindrical positions and such jolly, accordion-pleated frocks. There is also what Lord Elgin overlooked when he sacked the Parthenon.

However, it is not for the Museum, interesting as it is, that one visits the Acropolis.

Surely there was never so much beauty crowded into so small a space. One accords the Parthenon first place almost reluctantly, the claims of the Propylæa, of the Erechtheion and of the Odeion are so insistent. Yet always one must return to the Parthenon, as to the crowning glory of the whole. Not even the crude patching of Roman tile bricks can spoil its charm. The mighty pillars, perfect in their proportion and purity of outline, are perhaps even more beautiful in their half ruin than they would have been had the Venetian bomb failed to reach the Turkish powder magazine. The broken columns save the rest from the formal regularity which makes the Thesion curiously reminiscent of the Royal Exchange, and one's imagination is given the freer rein to reconstruct the temples and the quarters of the priests in all their native majesty. One can clothe their aisles and corridors anew with the sculptures which Phidias wrought, and call up to the eye of the mind the great statue fashioned in ivory and gold of Athene with her gold-tipped spear which, glinting in the liquid sunlight like the golden Virgin of Marseilles of later days and other scenes, met and gladdened the eager eyes of boatmen as they made for harbour.

There is something very wonderful about the

atmosphere of Greece, at any rate on clear, sunlight autumn days. The light is so all-pervading, so brilliant and yet so soft. It seems to flow round the objects it caresses, illuminating their most hidden corners, bathing them in quiet radiance. As one looks down from above, the shadow cast by the fig-tree seems but a splash of colour on the mountain side. There are no harsh or violent contrasts, as in countries where the sun has yet more power ; no veiling mist or fading contours, as in more northern climes. It is as though the country had been made and intended from the beginning of time to be the home of perfect sculpture.

After a visit all too brief for all there was to see, I returned at dusk to the hotel and enjoyed a delightful bathe in the Ægean. The sun had set in a violet sky and the water was warm and still. Then after dinner, for one must dine even at Athens, the moon rose and we went back to the Parthenon to see it under a still softer and more mysterious light. In conception and execution, with its surrounding temples and incomparable location, the Parthenon is without doubt one of the most beautiful and satisfying objects in the world.

I went to bed full of a double wonder : wonder at the richness of the classic glories of Greece, which had exceeded even my expectations, and

wonder at the thought that in three short days I had seen so many countries, so many changing scenes of beauty. I had come to the conclusion that, for sheer sightseeing, nothing could rival flying ; and I had long abandoned my early fears that I should find it a tiring method of travel. In so large a machine, equipped with so many conveniences, five or six hours in the air are definitely less wearying than as many hours spent in the most comfortable train. Then, too, flying is so much faster, and there are so many more and so much wider opportunities of really seeing and appreciating the countries and places across which one passes. You get such perfect pictures of the towns you visit.

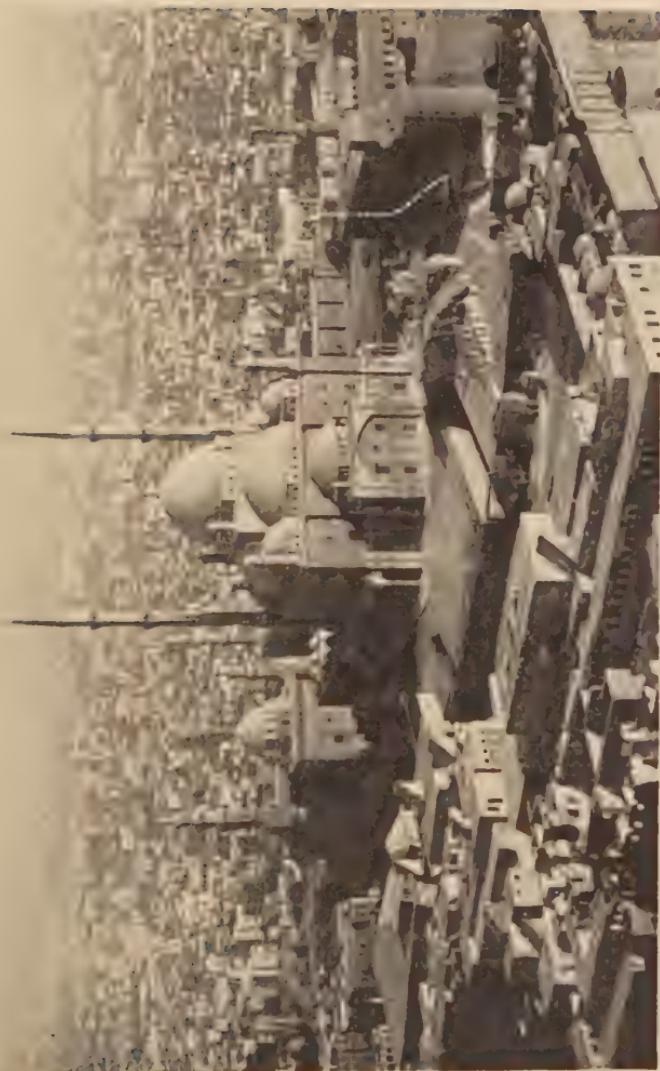
When one travels on land or even by water, it is rare to get a full and comprehensive view of any place. From the first, the outlook is limited by trees and houses. Many days may be spent in a city before one gets a real picture of it in one's mind. Approach a strange city from the air and, unless it be as vast a place as London, it is seen at once complete in its natural setting ; in all its native beauty or its man-created ugliness. Then later, if there is the time to spare, its details can be studied from the ground with a proper sense of the place each fills in the general scheme.

In such circumstances even a few hours can

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be spent profitably. At the end of so brief a visit as I had paid at Athens, I could leave feeling that, though I had seen but few of many objects of great interest, I had at least understood the little I had seen.

CAIRO.



V

SAND, RUIN AND GOLD

“The Pyramids, doting with age,
have forgotten the name of their
founder.”

Fuller; 1608.

CHAPTER V

SAND, RUIN AND GOLD

NEXT morning, the 2nd October, we left Athens and the holiday part of our trip behind us, and started for Egypt and the rapid series of inspections which was to be my share in the business side of the tour. We were a little late in getting off, as Scott had had trouble with the Zwicky pump on the previous evening and had been unable to refuel over night, as he had intended doing. However, he got up himself very early and by some means or other persuaded the pump to function ; so that we were able to take the air a little before 10 a.m. We had some little difficulty, too, in getting away from the jetty where the Iris had been moored; for the wind flows freshly into the open harbour and there was a good deal of movement.

We circled over the Temple of Wingless Victory, and then began an enchanted flight along the Cyclades, those lovely islands lolling in their azure seas and full of Gothic buildings built by the Venetians. Closer inspection would probably have revealed that many of the great

white houses that looked so picturesque were sadly in need of repair; but perched perilously upon steep cliffs, their shimmering outline mirrored in blue waters, they looked as we flew by like fairy palaces. One wondered whence the wealth had come that had raised them in such numbers upon these rocky islands, the natural beauty of which seemed to be their only fortune.

Scott had set our course direct for Aboukir and, after flying over Ceos, Thermia and Seriphos, past Minoa with the high peaks of Naxus rising behind it and the sea glinting in between, and by a host of lesser-known islands of delightful aspect, we drew into more open sea. Soon we were skirting the eastern point of Crete, with Rhodes rising in the distance on our left beyond the sharp ridge of Karpathos. Then we left the islands behind and flew over 350 miles of sea, empty except for two or three lonely steamers to whom we signalled with the Aldis lamp. They displayed a disappointing lack of interest in us and made no reply at all; so we salved our damaged pride by concluding that they must have been foreigners and unable to understand our messages.

We encountered a few scattered clouds and soon after, lying low ahead of us, appeared another cloudy shape. It rapidly resolved itself

into the long, flat coast of Africa, with Alexandria and the old-time island of Pharos on our left bow. We had been flying for a little over five hours with the wind behind us, at a speed of very nearly 100 miles an hour. Twenty minutes later we landed in Aboukir Bay, where we were met by Air Vice-Marshal Webb-Bowen, in command of the Air Force in the Middle East. We there said farewell to the Iris which, after carrying out certain exercises, was to make her way northwards to Alexandretta and then follow the river line down the Euphrates to Baghdad, where we were to rejoin her after our week in Egypt. Later we learnt that she had had considerable difficulty in getting across the Syrian mountains, owing to clouds.

We immediately transferred into Fairey III.F's and flew over Cairo to Heliopolis, the principal Air Station of Egypt; above the fantastically fertile Delta formed by the hydra-headed Nile, all corrugated with irrigation channels and dappled with cotton and millet crops. I asked the pilot to fly low to give me a better view, and was upbraided afterwards for taking unnecessary risks. It appeared that what I had thought to be grass meadows in which good landings could be made were really millet fields covered by crops 8 feet high!

We arrived at Heliopolis after an hour's

flight, just as the sun was setting behind the Pyramids in a sky of rose, blue, almond-green and lemon. We had seen the Parthenon and the Pyramids in one easy day, and Naples the day before. How swift and many-coloured my journey had already become ! In the whole of it I had had but one serious disappointment. At breakfast at Athens I had looked confidently for honey from Hymettus, and they had brought me Keillers' marmalade.

We have three squadrons in Egypt, apart from the one which was sent from Egypt to the Sudan. There is an Army Co-operation Squadron equipped with Bristol Fighters, a bombing squadron of Fairey III.F's, and a troop-carrier or heavy transport squadron of Victorias. These are stationed respectively at Heliopolis (Bristols and Victorias), and Helwan (Fairey III.F's). In addition, there is the depot at Aboukir and the training school at Abu-Sueir. Egypt affords almost ideal climatic conditions for flying, and is therefore eminently suitable for training pilots.

Vital as the control of the Suez Canal area was to the communications of the Empire in the old pre-war days, the development of flying—still only in its childhood—has added enormously to its importance. As the progress of flying continues, the significance of the Middle

East Command will yet further increase. Joining up with The Third Route, we have an air route under development from Cape Town through Cairo and Baghdad to India, Singapore and Australia. Aircraft have already bridged the long gap between Australia and New Zealand. Except for a comparatively short section in the Dutch East Indies, this route will be, in effect, an all-red route connecting four of the Dominions of the Empire through territories either British or within British spheres of influence or alliance. When both routes are in full operation, these four Dominions will be brought very much nearer in time to each other and to the heart of the British Empire. Cairo will be brought within 3 days of London, instead of $5\frac{1}{2}$; India within 6 days, instead of 15; Rangoon within 9 days, instead of 19; Singapore within 11 days, instead of 22, and Melbourne within 17 days, instead of 30. These times will be still further reduced when certain sections of the route are organised for night flying.

The Royal Air Force is not the responsible service for defence in Egypt. British responsibilities in that respect devolve upon the general officer commanding-in-chief under the War Office; but at Cairo are stationed the Headquarters of the Middle East Command, R.A.F., and from their central position our air forces in

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Egypt are available to reinforce at short notice our air forces in the Sudan, Palestine, Trans-jordan, Iraq and Aden. India, too, could be reinforced in case of need, and the value of the Middle East Command as a link in our Empire air communications is obvious.

The general policy which the R.A.F. is seeking to follow in the Middle East is that a certain number of squadrons shall normally be stationed in suitable strategic centres, ready for immediate action, with a properly organised system of air routes in between which will permit the reinforcement of one centre from another with the minimum of delay. In this way it is hoped to use the great mobility of aircraft to enable the total force of all arms constituting the various garrisons to be cut down as much as possible. Very material economies in men and money have already been effected, as will be perceived especially clearly when I come to Iraq. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the burdens laid upon Great Britain in respect of the Mandated Territories could have been met, in the great financial stringency which has prevailed since the war, had it not been for the relief afforded by the extended use of aircraft for defence and police purposes.

I had, of course, been well acquainted long before my visit to Egypt with the theory of our

eastern air policy; but theory and practical experience are poles asunder. Every day I was to spend in these eastern territories was to give me a clearer idea of the vital rôle which air power is destined to play in the communications of the Empire.

My inspections started on the morning after our arrival with a round of the air stations at Heliopolis, where are No. 208 (Bristol Fighter) Squadron and No. 216 (Victoria) Squadron, and a visit to No. 4 Flying Training School at Abu-Sueir, whence we returned to Cairo via Ismailia. Everything was so intensely interesting that I felt there was nothing which I could afford to miss, and Longmore was moved to pay me the entirely undeserved tribute of saying that my inspections were most thorough. He qualified his praise by commenting with considerable heat, physical and mental, upon my unseemly addiction to kitchens. The hotter the kitchen, he complained, and the fatter and wetter the cook, the longer I liked to stay there, asking interminable questions and absorbing the odour of some savoury stew or plum duff. It certainly was hot; but, if the R.A.F. can scarcely be said, without some stretching of metaphor, to fly upon its stomach, the proper care of the inner man certainly counts for as much with the Air Force as with the Army. I believed that I

could find in the admirable kitchen arrangements part of the explanation of the general atmosphere of contentment, well-being and keen interest in their work which impressed me wherever I went among the personnel of the Air Force in Egypt.

I had seen a good deal of station organisation, at one time or another, both at home and in France, Italy and the United States. I need say no more than that what I found in Egypt stood comparison with anything I had seen elsewhere. There is no doubt that our comparatively small air forces in Egypt are highly efficient and excellently well equipped.

The Training School at Abu-Sueir was particularly interesting, being the only R.A.F. establishment of this kind out of England. The staff there are doing very good work, and are helped greatly by the admirable flying conditions. It may be said, of course, that pilots who can fly successfully in England can fly anywhere ; they are, no doubt, chastened by adversity and learn in a hard school. Beginners, however, do not want conditions which are too difficult and there are, therefore, manifest advantages in training in a climate like that of Egypt. My visit to the school gave me the opportunity, also, to make the acquaintance of the Suez Canal in circumstances much more pleasant

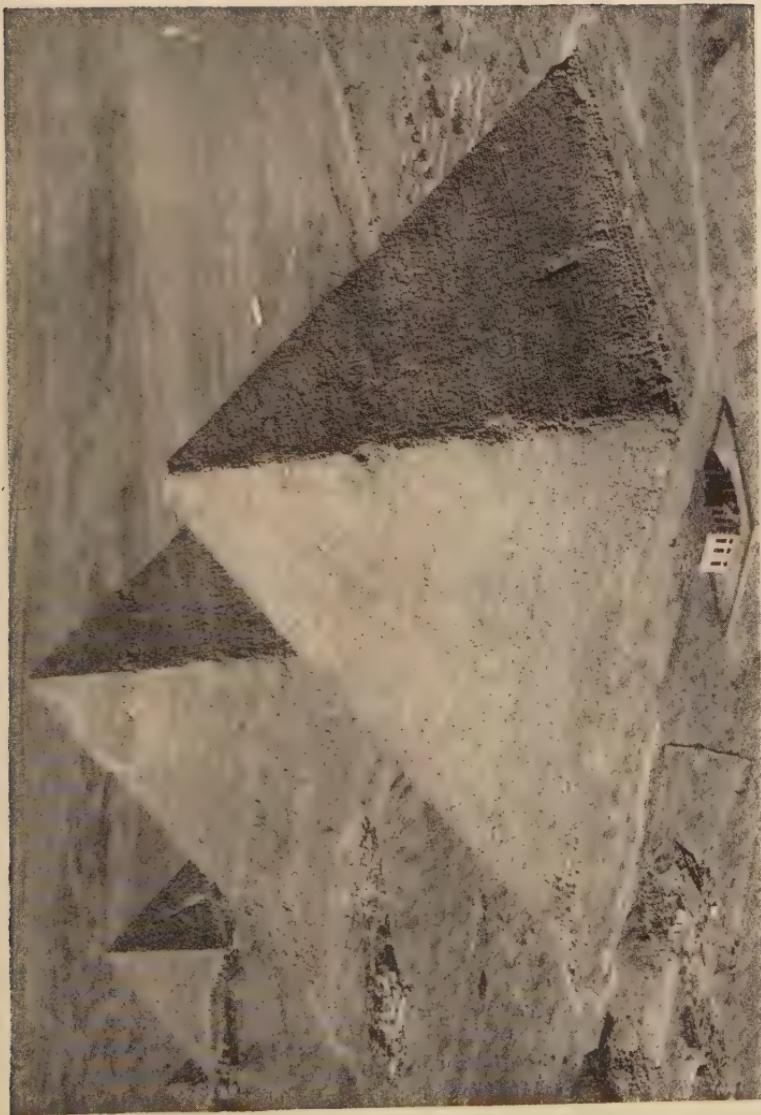
than steaming through it on board a sun-scorched ship.

After dinner we went for a night flight over Cairo in a Victoria troop carrier. I have always liked night-flying in good weather. Everything is so still and peaceful and one is not bumped about as one is liable to be at hot noon tide. Under the clear Egyptian sky the lights of the great city shone out like a minor constellation. One caught the pale glint of water stretching out like a broad ribbon to South and North, and beyond the limits of the cultivated area the serried ranges of dark blue, desert hills reached out to a dim, mysterious horizon. Shadows hid the ravages of time upon the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The great machine which bore us through the heavens alone reminded us of the age in which we lived.

We visited No. 45 Squadron (Fairey III.F's) at Helwan on the 4th October, flying the seventy odd miles in machines detailed from that squadron to carry us on our round of visits in Egypt and the Sudan. The "camel" crest of No. 45 Squadron has won renown throughout the R.A.F., and I found the station to be fully up to the standard set at Heliopolis. After lunching there, we flew back, at my request, on the other side of the river, so as to see the whole line of the Pyramids from the air.

It is only from above that one can form a proper idea of the geometrical exactness with which the mighty monuments were planned and executed. My thirst for sightseeing nearly led to a bad accident ; for just as we were over the Pyramids of Gizeh my engine cut out and we had to make a forced landing. We were then about to turn over the Nile, flying very low, and one minute later we should have had to land in the irrigation belt, with a good chance of "writing off" the machine. As it was, we landed comfortably in the desert. Webb-Bowen came down beside us and I got into his machine and went back with him to Heliopolis. It turned out that the throttle rod of my machine had broken and damaged the centre row of cylinders ; a rather unusual occurrence.

It seemed quite strange, after the hurry of my journey out, to sleep two nights running in the same place. Strange, but very pleasant ; for it gave me the opportunity to see something of a most interesting city and its equally interesting surroundings. The weather was delightful, a cool breeze tempering the heat of the sun, while the fresh green of the Nile-fed vegetation formed a delightful contrast to the autumn aridity of Naples and Athens. The flowering trees, even at so late a season, were still in glorious bloom. Avenues of jacarandas



THREE PYRAMIDS OF GIZEH.

festooned with countless blue flowers, and the golden mohurs with their scarlet panicles, made the more open streets and gardens scenes of beauty. In their own way they convey a sense of oriental strangeness as vivid as do the narrow, tortuous streets and thronged bazaars of the eastern quarter of the city.

Wonderful indeed is the alchemy of sun and water in combination ; but both are still engaged in their age-long warfare and the bounds of cultivation are strictly set. The transition from luxuriant vegetation to absolute barrenness, as one rides out from the irrigated area into the desert, is startling in its suddenness. I rode on a pony. If I have to be bumped about I prefer an aeroplane to a camel. Aeroplanes are relatively clean and they do not bite. We went out on an assortment of steeds, in the early morning before breakfast, and in the space of a few minutes were in the heart of the sandhills. We might, for all that could be seen to the contrary, have been as many hundreds of miles from Cairo as we were hundreds of yards. The rounded shoulders of the great dunes cut us off on all sides ; or, as our steeds laboured up their sides, stretched out to the horizon in a succession of broken waves, like giant rollers of a stormy sea. There is a charm in the utter loneliness of the desert, in the still mysterious whisperings of the softly

moving sands, which is strangely attractive—when one knows that a short hour's ride will take one back to civilisation.

On the other of my two mornings in Cairo I went to the museum and renewed my acquaintance with the wonders of Tutankh-Amen's Tomb and the other relics of ancient Egypt. I had seen something of the former in 1923 ; but even that experience had scarcely prepared me for the richness, the massed magnificence and the exquisite workmanship of the complete collection which can now be seen at the museum. The prodigal use of gold is most impressive, and when one thinks that all these splendid objects are but the funeral trappings of one of the lesser Pharaohs who died in his early youth, one can begin to understand the old saying that the sands of Egypt were of gold.

Yet with it all the effect is sombre. Everything is shrouded with the atmosphere of death and the tomb. Art and architecture alike in Egypt seem to mark the apotheosis of the worship of the dead. Each is in such striking contrast with the light and life of the monuments of ancient Greece. It is strange to think that two such different civilisations, each so perfect in its kind, could have flourished on opposite sides of the narrow waters of the Mediterranean. Stranger still to realise that

they came in contact with each other. One feels that through all those distant centuries when Egypt was the home of civilisation the shadow of the Dark Continent lay heavy on her children.



SECTION OF FLOATING DOCK FOR SINGAPORE BEING TOWED DOWN SUEZ CANAL.

VI

OLD MAN RIVER

“Where the knotty crocodile
Lies and blinks in the Nile,
And the red flamingo flies
Hunting fish before his eyes.”

CHAPTER VI

OLD MAN RIVER

EGYPT is the Nile, and the Nile Egypt. Only the waters of the river keep the desert at bay. Those are commonplaces of 5,000 years standing ; but they strike each visitor to Egypt with the force of a new discovery. Never is their truth more startlingly apparent than when one follows the course of the Nile by air.

South of the fertile delta plain, itself the creation of flood-borne silt, the river, with its twin strips of verdure clinging to its banks and hemmed in by steep cliffs, looks like a long, winding lane traversing laboriously a wilderness of primeval solitude. It is the highway up and down which the civilisation of ancient Egypt, varying with the fortunes of the Pharaohs, ebbed and flowed for unnumbered years, never straying far from its life-giving waters, ever dependent upon their seasonal rise and fall.

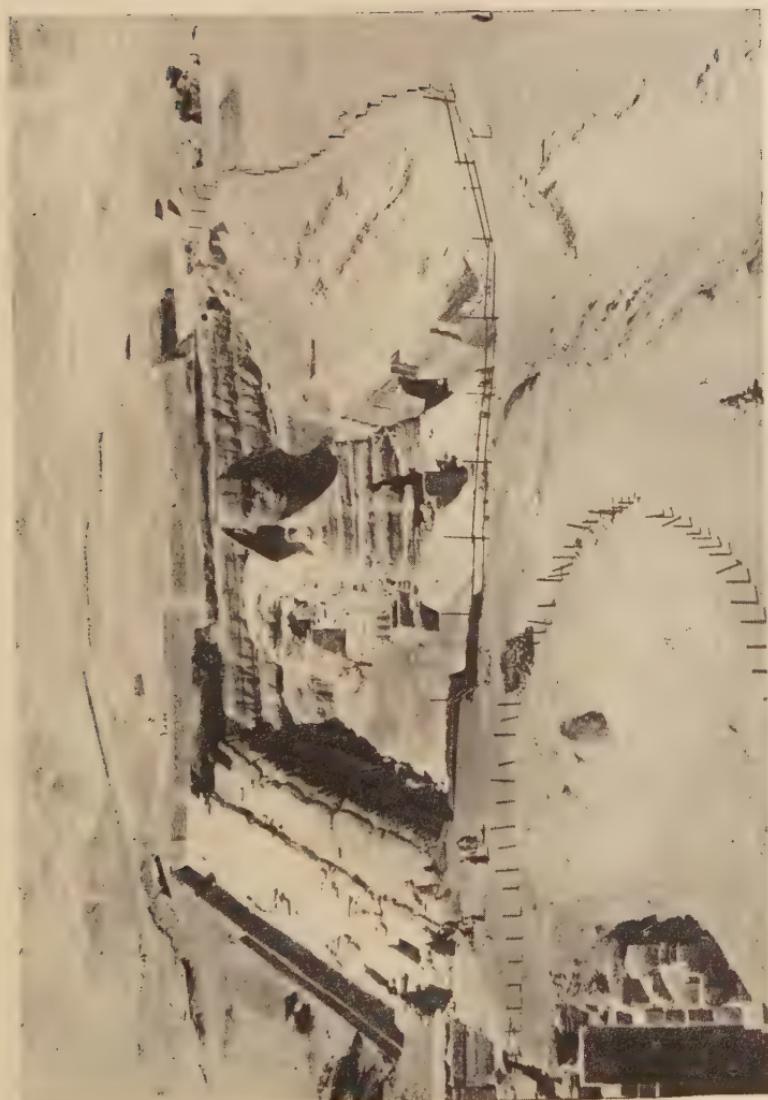
The Etesian wind, blowing constantly from the north, urged the old-time sailing boats, of which the modern felucca is the lineal descen-

dant, southwards against the river stream ; to be borne back later by the current, laden with stone for the builder-kings or freighted with gold and emeralds won hardly from the thirsty fastnesses of the Nubian Desert. Cities and temples were strung out along the narrow, cultivated belt, a belt which to-day averages some ten miles in width in Middle Egypt and rarely exceeds two miles in Upper Egypt, like beads upon a chain. The Egyptians were the first exponents of the "strip" method of town planning.

Of the whole area of modern Egypt, which is more than three times the size of the British Isles, only one-fifteenth part is not barren desert. One day, perhaps, the waters of the Mediterranean will be let into the vast depression out in the desert west of the Delta, bringing electric power to the industries of Cairo and, it may be, combining with the enormous stores of irrigation water distributed from behind the dams to modify in some degree the climate of north-eastern Africa. Yet no human work is likely to effect a change which will render the life of man in Egypt independent of the Nile.

My inspections in Lower Egypt over, soon after 6 o'clock on the morning of the 5th October in glorious weather, we left the aerodrome at Heliopolis and started on our

THE SPHINX AFTER RECENT EXCAVATIONS.



journey to Khartum. We were a flight of Fairey III.F's. Flight Lieut. Gayford and Flying Officers Rowe and Harrison piloting Longmore, Webb-Bowen and myself, with a couple of mechanics to look after the engines and machines. We were to have the company of the Nile, there and back, for 2,500 miles, and we felt that, if any persons were justified in chanting "Old Man River," which might be open to reasonable doubt, we took high rank among them. For some distance we kept to the right bank, the Pyramids of Gizeh and the Sphinx, and later the half-finished Pyramid of Maydam, showing up successively across the river through the early morning mist. We had the usual wind behind us, and our three Faireys put old Horus to shame as we sped across the cloudless Egyptian sky. At 2,000 feet we got a good view of the formation known to geologists as the "rift" valley, and the bright green of the fields bordering the red-brown waters of the flooded river contrasted vividly with the bare, yellow rocks and sandhills of the limestone plateaux, between which the valley is deeply sunk. Even at 2,000 feet the air was distinctly chilly.

The contrast in temperatures during our flight was indeed as great and as sharply marked as that between the desert and the valley. For

the greater part of the journey we flew high, at some 7,000 feet or more, in order to avoid the radiation eddies and vertical currents which at lower levels would have heaved the machines about in uncomfortable fashion. At such a height the temperature is definitely cold even at midday. Then we would come to a refuelling station, or to some object of interest a nearer view of which was worth the bumps it cost, and would glide down into temperatures which, as we got farther South, became tropical. One might have thought that such rapid changes would have brought for unseasoned visitors chills and fevers in their train ; but none of us suffered any ill effects, or even serious discomfort.

We reached Assiut at about 7.30 a.m., having flown 200 miles in an hour and thirty minutes ; good going even with the help of the Etesian wind. We landed for more petrol ; for we had another 450 miles ahead of us before we should reach Wadi Halfa. The landing ground is of the ordinary desert type with a petrol hut. As luck would have it, a Victoria from No. 216 Squadron chanced to be there too, and its crew assisted us in refuelling. Ten minutes to stretch our legs and then we were in the air again. Shortly afterwards we saw the barrage, which is South of the aerodrome, crossing the flooded

river like a great causeway. The whole river valley seemed to be covered by the inundations, right up to the foot of the sandstone cliffs.

Within the hour we passed over the White Temple of Osiris at Abydos. On my previous visit to Egypt I had walked through this great structure, built of crystalline limestone by Seti I as a place for the adoration of the early kings. I had admired close at hand its carved walls and columns, some still supporting their solid-hewn stone arches, and had heard the myth of Isis and Osiris told in the temple which had become the most sacred of Osiris' many tombs. It was, therefore, with special interest that I now noted with what impressive grandeur the huge "L" shaped building stood out in gleaming whiteness against the desert sands. When the full length of the forecourts was still complete, more than doubling the 250 feet of wall and column which are all now left remaining of the main temple, it must have been a shrine well worthy to be the resting place of the head of the god who begot Horus, his avenger and restorer.

On our outward journey, soon after passing Abydos, we left the river for a time and cut straight across the desert, avoiding the eastwards bend of the Nile in which are the temples of Denderah and Karnak, the ruins of Thebes and

the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. These, too, I had seen on foot in 1923 when Luxor was the magnet which drew everyone, who had time and opportunity to go there, in the hope of seeing the interior of Tutankh-Amen's Tomb. We were to see them again from the air on our return journey. I do not think that I had ever quite realised the size of Karnak until I saw it from the air, nor exactly understood how the Valley of the Kings lies in the configuration of the Theban hills.

The existing temple at Denderah, a mere upstart of the 1st century B.C., is too modern to have much attraction for the casual visitor eager to be impressed with monuments thousands of years older, and is too surrounded by rubbish heaps to be seen at its best advantage either from the ground or from the air. It has, however, a remarkable quantity of ceremonial inscriptions, which are carried even into the secret chambers which can never have seen the light of day. There is the additional attraction that here can be seen the goddess of love and beauty worshipped in the useful but unlovely form of a cow. Not even a conventional head-dress can really make a cow beautiful, to anyone but a dairyman. Fortunately, on the capitals of the pillars of the Great Court of Heaven her head is shown in human form—but even so it

is not very beautiful according to modern ideas. Of course, this is another of the places where Osiris was buried.

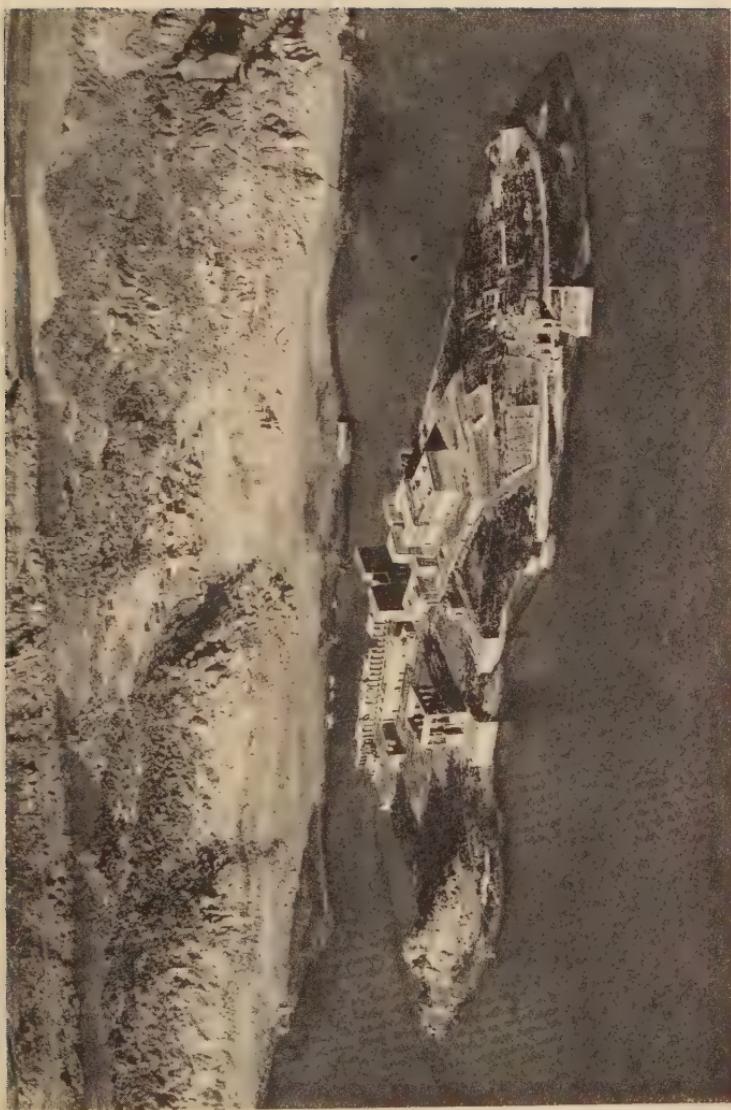
There is far more to be seen on the southern side of the river bend, around Thebes the ancient capital of Upper Egypt. Here Ammon, or Ammon-Ra was the chief deity, with Hathor and Mut in close attendance. The whole district is stiff with temples and honeycombed with tombs. The western half of the city was nothing but a vast necropolis, inhabited by the dead and their attendant priesthood. The mighty Temple of Ammon at Luxor with its avenue of sphinxes, the immemorial Temple of Karnak with its immense columnar hall which Rameses II completed, and the obelisks of Hatshepsut and Tethmosis I are only rivalled as spectacles, whether seen from the ground or from the air, by the huge Colossi of Memnon and the rock temples of Abu Simbel. The two Memnon brothers were standing out of the flooded land with their feet in the water when we saw them. Even from the height at which we flew they looked as much Colossi as when I viewed them from the ground.

The Temple of Ammon, where was worshipped also his wife Mut and their child Khons, and the great state Temple of Karnak, the largest of all known temples, both stand

on the East bank of the river. The best view of the Temple at Luxor is undoubtedly obtained across the river from the West bank; preferably at sunset, when the soft lights and colours of the Egyptian evening pick out the splendid lines of the noble structure and veil the defects of time. Yet the schemes of both temples are so vast that neither can be said to have been seen completely till they have been seen from the air.

Flying at 5,000 feet, we glimpsed Luxor in the distance before meeting the river again just below Esna. Here in the fine pillared hall, now half buried in rubbish, of another triad temple a fish was worshipped. A little farther on appeared the huge pylons of Edfu, the sandstone temple of the falcon-headed sun-god. Although this is another rather modern structure, judged by Egyptian standards, it is almost complete and looks particularly well from the air. The winged sun-disk, into which Hor-Hut transformed himself in his battle with Seth-Typhon, figures largely in the temple decorations and is not at all unlike the Royal Air Force badge. It was believed, doubtless correctly, to be a strong talisman against evil.

Next, on the very verge of the river which year by year is eating away the cliff on which it stands, we saw the temple of Kom Ombo. The



PHILAE.

Ptolemaic structure must ultimately go the way of the far earlier temples which preceded it. It is not so well preserved as the temple at Edfu ; but is still an imposing mass of pillars and mighty roof stones. Here the ancient Egyptians worshipped the crocodile, fed it on butter and fresh fowls, and gave it ear-rings of green glass. There are on view in a small outer mausoleum many mummies of this divinity, which must have cost a great deal of labour and material to embalm. Somehow, the result does not seem to have been worth it.

Whatever may be said about the temples, there is no doubt that the dam at Assuan gains immensely in impressiveness when viewed from an aeroplane. The colossal mass of masonry, a mile and a quarter in length, well stands comparison with the work of the Pharaohs and the great blocks of which it is composed were hewn from quarries which the Pharaohs used.

The sluices were open and had let loose their garnered floods upon the irrigated lands below, so Philae was free from the watery shroud which envelops her during the greater part of the year, when the dam is full. To be covered by water is no new experience for the island ; since the temple of Isis which Nekhtnebf built, the last great work of the last of the native

kings of Egypt, was almost entirely destroyed by floods and was partly reconstructed by the Ptolemies. The existing buildings are mostly the work of the Ptolemies and the Cæsars, for the island was a favourite religious resort for Greek and Roman visitors. The beautiful unfinished building known as Pharaoh's Bed is Roman work. So, though worship of the old gods of Egypt long lingered there, the annual flooding of the island contains no threat of irreparable damage to the records of more ancient Egypt. The palm trees have gone, but the action of the water seems actually to be having a beneficial effect upon the buildings by dissolving the salts and incrustations which were gradually disintegrating their stones.

On our return journey we went across from Assuan to Philae and rowed from the island to the dam. The boat was a pale blue with a wooden canopy, and the oarsmen as they rowed sang the song of the Nubian boatmen; less tuneful but as picturesque as the Volga song. The chorus of "Hip, hip, hip, hurrah" breaks strangely into its native character. After our hurried rushing through the heavens at 110 miles an hour, rowing seemed a very peaceful method of progression. On the one side of the river a desert of hard, dusty grey, covered with granite quarries; on the other a desert of

illimitable, smooth, soft, golden sand. The whole scene was quite lovely—the island with its temples rising from the placid waters of the lake, the long line of the dam closing the horizon to the North, and above us the evening star shining in a rainbow-coloured sky.

Soon after leaving Philae we made another short cut across the desert, and on rejoining the river came to the splendid rock temples of Abu Simbel. I had not seen these before and I got Gayford to take the machine down low, so that I could get a closer view. The temples are magnificent. They are hewn out of the solid rock in the cliffs beside the river. To form the façade of the principal temple, the whole hillside has been deeply recessed. On either side of the entrance are two colossal seated figures of Rameses II 65 feet high, immensely calm. Smaller figures show his Queen Nefertari and their sons and daughters. Over all is the massive cornice with its line of giant hieroglyphs and rows of apes gazing East in adoration of the rising sun, Amen-Ra, to whom the temple was dedicated. The lesser rock temple, with its façade of six figures 33 feet high, is dwarfed by its greater consort which, without doubt, is one of the finest and most awe-inspiring sights which even Egypt has to offer.

We reached Wadi Halfa before midday and landed in the usual heat-wave. The Acting District Commissioner, Gardine, met us and took us to the river steamer "Meröe," where we were to stay the night. After lunch, and a siesta which the thermometer fully justified, to say nothing of our morning flight, we took ponies and rode out into the desert. I longed to get back to Abu Simbel to see the interior of the temples which had impressed me so much ; but that was impossible. The natives we passed were very polite. All got up to salute us as we rode through the village, and did so as though they liked it and were moved by a sense of respect for themselves as well as for us.

Wadi Halfa is, in fact, the frontier town of the Sudan and the terminus of the Sudan Government railway. Between Assuan and Wadi Halfa the difficult nature of the country has so far prevented any railway being carried through. The town was the main base for the operations against the Dervishes, after Gordon fell at Khartum. It is now an important centre of the Sudan Civil Service, and has a golf course with sandy greens and clean swept "pretties." Golf is quite possible in spite of the heat, for the air is so free from moisture that one can perspire freely and dry again in a couple of minutes.

At dinner on the "Meröe" we had a most excellent Nile perch, as fat as butter. I felt that, if the fish worshipped at Esna belonged to the same species, the choice of a deity there had some reasonable justification. We passed the night on board very pleasantly, sleeping on deck and finding the air cool enough to demand substantial coverings.

At 6 a.m. next morning we took the air again, and this time left the Nile for a long spell, following the course of the Sudan railway across 200 miles and more of the Nubian Desert. We rose to 6,000 feet, where we found a nice temperature; but it was none too easy to see the railway track, as the sand had blown over it in many places. We had to keep our eyes well open for it, since this desert is no place in which to get lost. It is the most barren and desolate waste in the world, and looks as though it had never changed from the beginning of time. How the Egyptians managed to enter it and find gold there and, having found the gold, to supply themselves with food and water while they worked their mines is a mystery. We were travelling again at a great speed, probably 125 miles per hour. The machines themselves were anxious to leave behind them the bare and black-looking rock hills, the fine, wind-driven particles from which

stained the surrounding desert sand like streaks of coal dust.

We reached the river again at Abu Hamed. By 8.45 a.m. Atbara was in sight and we came down into the heat and bumps preparatory to landing for more petrol. The landing ground is very good, fine pebbles covering the ordinary desert sand, and it is close to the railway works. This is convenient, as we were to discover on our return. The headquarters of the Sudan Government railway are here, and the officials rose nobly to the occasion with iced lemon squashes. We politely but firmly resisted a pressing invitation to see over the railway depot. It was grilling hot, and the kitchens at Heliopolis would have been nothing to it.

In less than an hour we were up again and started on the last 160 miles which would bring us to Khartum. Soon after passing over the Pyramids of Meroe, whence came the treasure of Queen Candace, we were met at Shendi by six Fairey III.F's from No. 47 Squadron at Khartum, and flew on for the rest of our journey in an imposing formation of nine machines. The spectacle of the nine machines roaring across the Egyptian heavens, with the sun glinting on their Fairey Reid propellers, was one of striking beauty and would have filled the priests of Horus with envy. We arrived over Khartum at



PYRAMID OF CEPHREN.

11.30 in a crescendo of bumps, having done the 550 miles from Wadi Halfa in four and a half hours' flying. Before we landed we got a good view of the town of Gordon and Kitchener, and picked up easily the outline of the "Union Jack" upon which originally it was so appropriately planned.

VII
THE SUDAN

“O Africa mysterious land,
Surrounded by a lot of sand.”

Belloc.



CHAPTER VII

THE SUDAN

WE were met at the aerodrome at Khartum by Major-General H. J. Huddleston, the Commander of the Sudan Defence Force, Wing Commander George Reid and Squadron Leader Cox, commanding No. 47 Squadron. The Governor-General, Sir John Maffey, was away on leave. My programme allowed for a full day for my inspection of the squadron and station, so we had time to spare to see something also of Khartum and the old city of Omdurman on the West side of the river.

At home one scarcely realises the size of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. It is about twenty times the size of England and there is only the one railway system, that from Wadi Halfa to Khartum, Sennar and El Obeid, with its Atbara branch to Suakin and Port Sudan and the recently opened line linking Port Sudan direct with the Gezireh cotton area. The difficulties of communication are enormous, and are complicated in the southern districts by vast areas of swamps, the home of the Nuers. Yet, until last year, the whole country was controlled by two

British Infantry Battalions, some artillery and one flight of aeroplanes at Khartum ; together with the Sudan Defence Force, a fine native army of just under 10,000 officers and men under British and native officers. As a result of the successful use of air forces for defence purposes in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, the air strength in the Sudan has now been increased to a full squadron.

I was left in no doubt but that the Air Force personnel in the Sudan were fully prepared to take their full share in the work of maintaining peace and order. Officers and men were all in fine fettle and seemed keen and alert. They had already taken part with success in two important patrols against the Nuers. In one of them they had obtained in a few days results which by other means it would have taken many weeks and much labour in an unhealthy climate to achieve.

The Nuers are a most primitive race of semi-nomads who live on their herds. It is part of their daily life to be frequently on the move in search of fresh pastures. Of distinctly unprepossessing appearance, tall, thin and spindly-legged like a race of human storks, they seem to consider that the smallest possible fragment of clothing, supplemented in the case of the men by a spear or club, is sufficient attire for

either sex. They know their own country backwards and forwards and are exceedingly mobile, as might be expected from their build. When they have got into trouble, which is often, they drive their cattle away to some hidden island in the marshes, secrete their few other belongings and womenfolk there, and take the field. The result is that they are exceedingly difficult to bring to book and, even when they have been rounded up into some swamp fastness, it is often impossible for infantry to get at them by open attack. A long siege has to be undertaken, during which many of the besieging forces inevitably fall sick.

The particular sections of the Nuer tribe against which the air forces in the Sudan were engaged last year were those inhabiting the Lau and Lake Jorr areas, in the extreme South of the Sudan, close to the Uganda frontier. The one case centred round a witch-doctor named Gwek Wonding who owned a mud pyramid 60 feet high. This had been built by his grandfather, a noted witch-doctor who had caused himself to be buried there. It was adorned at the top by a long iron rod which was regarded with especial reverence. The prestige which had accrued to Gwek from this unique inheritance had brought him many adherents and he had begun to give serious trouble, besides threatening

to murder the District Commissioner. It was decided that, in the interests of the peaceful inhabitants of the district he was harrying, his band must be dispersed and his pyramid abolished.

The force detailed to deal with Gwek comprised sixty rifles and two machine guns of No. 7 Infantry Company, Equatorial Corps, forty police, and a flight of No. 47 Squadron; a small enough force, even with supports behind them, to deal with 4,000 fighting men, possibly half of them armed with rifles. Operations started with the bombing of Gwek's village and hostile concentrations and herds in the vicinity. Further action was then suspended to enable the political officer to investigate and ascertain the results of the bombing. He reported that the material damage had been small, but that the moral effect was very good. The Nuer concentrations had been broken up and scattered over a large area.

A company of mounted rifles, a camel company and the remainder of No. 7 Company had now joined the expedition. After air reconnaissance, an advance was made on Gwek's village which was found to have been hastily evacuated. The village was burned and the pyramid robbed of its adornments. Gwek and his followers had retired to a different district. This meant more long marches, but meanwhile

the Air Force again took action and a few days later Gwek's chief supporter surrendered with a body of 100 fighting men. Organised resistance had already ceased, and the operations now resolved themselves into an endeavour to round up Gwek himself.

This proved no easy task. At first he did his best to stir up trouble in other districts ; but as the pursuit continued his friends fell away from him, till he was left with a small party of personal adherents. Patrols were sent out in all likely directions, until it was definitely ascertained that Gwek was a fugitive with no following and had left the Lau area for an unknown destination. The patrol was then ended by the solemn blowing up of Gwek's pyramid in the presence of the assembled chiefs of the district, who were profoundly impressed by the sudden disappearance of an object which they had been taught to venerate as possessing magic powers. It was a pity that Gwek was not captured ; for we were told at Khartum that he had returned to commit another atrocity and was still at large and very truculent. Since my return, other operations have been necessary, and the redoubtable Gwek has been finally accounted for.

The second expedition arose out of the murder of the District Commissioner, Captain V. H.

Fergusson, with a Greek merchant and friendly natives, at Lake Jorr, near Shambe. A small force of similar composition was sent at once to Shambe to round up Chief Garluark, who was responsible for the murders, and to inflict punishment on the Nuers immediately concerned. An advance was made in three columns, converging on Lake Jorr, and before it had gone far Garluark gave himself up. There remained the punishment of the actual murderers. The advance continued, meeting with some small resistance at one or two points. Much of the line of march was through continuous swamps and progress was most difficult. The effect, however, was to drive the enemy into an area of swamps and small islands bordering the Bahr el Ghazel River, where it was quite impossible for the troops to follow them without sinking up to their necks in water. Accordingly, all known exits from the area were blocked by the troops and, as an alternative to a prolonged siege which would have entailed much suffering and loss of life to besiegers and besieged alike, the Royal Air Force were called in to bring the operations to a quick and decisive end. The enemy were located by the aircraft and subjected to systematic air action, with the result that in the course of a few days they surrendered.

These two successful operations had naturally put the squadron concerned into very good heart, and all I met were quite confident that the Sudan is in many ways an ideal country for the application of air power. Flying conditions are good, distances are great and ground communications are poor. In the South a road once made has usually to be cleared yearly, or it becomes lost in rampant vegetation. Some of the peoples to be controlled are, as has been seen, highly mobile and elusive. Action, to be effective, must be immediate. All those obstacles to the preservation of order can be met and overcome by aircraft, and in no other way can this be done with such facility and such small expenditure of money and men.

I was delighted to find General Huddleston very sympathetic and hopeful on the subject of air co-operation in the Sudan. He made me feel that the air arm was going to be given another real opportunity to prove what it is worth in the distant and less developed portions of the Empire, and with every prospect of success. Both he and Lady Huddleston showed themselves, also, to be most kind and considerate hosts in every way during our short stay. In addition to making me fully acquainted with the work and prospects of the Air Force in the area of his command, General Huddleston was most

helpful in assisting me to see as much as possible of Khartum and its immediate neighbourhood in the hours that remained to me after I had completed my inspection.

Khartum, in addition to its undying associations with General Gordon and Kitchener's campaign against the Mahdi, in which a certain Captain Douglas Haig in command of the native cavalry at the battles of Atbara and Omdurman drew attention to himself by the excellence of his leadership, is in many ways a most attractive city. First and foremost, there are no mosquitos, a fact of which the European residents there frequently remind you with much pride. Such reminder is indeed unnecessary, for one soon makes the discovery for oneself with as much surprise as satisfaction. The explanation is that the atmosphere is too dry; but the cotton-growing plantations of Gezireh are gradually creeping nearer and in time a change may come.

It was Kitchener himself who, after the destruction of the former city by the Mahdi, drew the plans of the city in the form of the Union Jack, and loyalty to the Empire seems to be in the blood of all its inhabitants. The situation of the town, at the meeting place of the waters of the Blue and White Niles, is wholly admirable, and its charm is enhanced by the

presence of the picturesque old capital of the Mahdi across the water. The view from the air is particularly fine. The streets and public places are excellently well laid out and kept, with plenty of grass and well-watered gardens. There are, as might be expected, many statues and other reminders of both Gordon and Kitchener.

We went for our usual constitutional on horseback out into the desert before breakfast on the morning after our arrival. Later in the day we visited the Zoo, a most delightful garden, full of trees and running with streams of water. Most of the animals are quite tame, and charming little gazelles, as well as birds of all descriptions, flamingos, hammer-headed storks and many others, wander about at large. The gazelles come to eat out of one's hand, and have very well-groomed coats and very pointed toe-nails. Brocklehurst, who is in charge of the Zoo, was away; but we were told that when he comes into the grounds all the gazelles, antelopes and birds follow him about like the children after the Pied Piper, and even the very fine specimen of a lion wags his tail and yawns. There are whole masses of monkeys, some with terribly human-looking babies hanging on to them with all a baby's resolution. Some of them wear red and sky

blue skins, presumably out of compliment to the Royal Air Force, but the effect is somewhat startling. There is a very friendly hippo to whom, as in duty bound, I gave a piece of sugar—an infinitesimal offering to so huge a beast; but bulk is not everything. He turned quite queer with delight, shut his eyes, dribbled at the mouth and made little grunting noises of intense satisfaction.

It was very hot indeed going round the squadron workshops, and after a welcome lunch, at which a number of the officers of the squadron joined us and entertained us with stories of the work they were doing and hoped to do, we took a launch and went across the river to see something of Omdurman. Here, too, British control has worked a great change. The principal parts of the town have become quite civilised looking, with wide streets and tidy shops. The mud huts and network of narrow, native lanes are tucked away out of sight; until one goes to look for them. We saw all that Kitchener's shells have left of the Mahdi's Tomb. Behind the tomb is the house in which the Mahdi lived, and close by the two-storied house of the Khalifa Abdullah who succeeded the Mahdi Mohammed when the latter died at the height of his power. The Khalifa ruled, like the Mahdi, by the sword and added to the Babel-

like mixture of the populace by compelling disaffected tribesmen to live in the town under the eye of his soldiery. Whatever his faults, and doubtless they were many, the Khalifa knew the value of fresh water, and his bath is still a feature of his house.

Notwithstanding that we left Khartum at the early hour of 5.30 a.m., both General and Lady Huddleston came to see us off. People rise early in these southern countries, for the dawn is the nicest part of the day. The ground wind had very conveniently turned and blew from the South; but we benefited little by it, as we shortly rose to a good height to avoid the bumps and encountered the usual North wind which took a good deal off our pace. We landed again at Atbara to refuel, and almost immediately after restarting had to return there, for the fabric started to strip off Longmore's machine and we were obliged to land to put it right. I had just breathed a fervent prayer that I might never see Atbara again, for it is one of the hottest spots on earth. It was then that we found the advantage of being near the railway workshops. The staff at once produced the necessary material and helped us to secure the fabric with battens. Even so, it took us two hours to get the damage put right. At first I tried to make myself useful; but when more

efficient help arrived I gave the thermometer "best" and lay down and slept in the shade of one of the wings, with my topee as a pillow.

Except for running into the tail end of a sandstorm over the Nubian Desert, and our visit to Philae which I have already described, this not very serious mishap was the only special incident of our return journey which was made by the same stages as our outward trip. Sandstorms are the one real danger to flying in this country. Flying in the midst of a proper sandstorm is impossible. The impalpably fine, yet abominably gritty, dust gets everywhere and visibility is as bad as in a thick fog, if indeed it is not worse. Fortunately, one usually gets warning of what is coming. If the sandstorm cannot be avoided by rising above it or altering course, one makes a quick descent to land and does one's best to breathe till the storm is over.

We landed at Heliopolis at 11.15 a.m. on the 9th October, having covered some 2,500 miles in twenty and a half flying hours. In the five days we had viewed the length of Egypt and almost all her temples, had reached the centre of the Sudan and seen something of that splendid province. It had been a wonderful journey.



FAIREY III F. ARRIVING OVER KHARTUM AND SHOWING LAY-OUT OF TOWN IN FORM OF A UNION JACK.

VIII

THE FOUR RIVERS OF ANTIQUITY

“I will even make a way in the
wilderness, and rivers in the
desert.”

Isaiah xlivi. 19.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUR RIVERS OF ANTIQUITY

IN Egypt one has to break oneself quickly of the habit of saying to people “another fine day.” The time-honoured English greeting appears to awake doubts as to one’s mental condition. All the residents take the fine weather for granted, which shows how soon mankind forgets to feel gratitude for blessings freely given. Still, when we rose at dawn on the 10th October for our long 800-mile flight to Baghdad, it *was* a fine day, and I for one was glad and thankful for it.

It was most agreeably cool in Cairo, after the grilling heat of the Sudan, and I felt very fit and eager for the new adventure. We were to travel in Wapitis, four of which, as it happened, were being flown out to Iraq by Flight Lieut. de Burgh and another young officer and two sergeant pilots from No. 84 Squadron. This was a change from the original arrangement, which I welcomed as giving me the opportunity to try a new type of aeroplane.

As we circled round before starting on our

course I took a final look at the flooded Nile, one, and I think the finest, of the four great rivers of antiquity. Before the day was over I was to see the other three, the Jordan—a wretched stream by comparison—the Tigris and the Euphrates ; the last two great rivers indeed, but to-day not so interesting as the Nile. In time, perhaps, the irrigation systems of the early civilisations of Iraq may be restored and the rivers of Mesopotamia will take rank again beside their Egyptian rival.

We headed off for Ismailia and the Canal, the sun just rising in a gloriously coloured sky. I shall never forget the skies of Egypt. We passed over the Training School at Abu Sueir—there were no interesting ships in the Canal—and soon were flying over sandhills rather farther from the coast than seemed necessary. I doubt if we had allowed enough for the North wind drift. We came in sight of the coast at El Arish, and the sea looked very pleasant and blue again after the silt-laden waters of the Nile.

Our next landmark was Gaza, scene of Allenby's victory and now labelled for all to see by a great white "Gaza" laid out in a white circle on the aerodrome. It has no need to be ashamed of its name, for it is one of the oldest towns in the world and is mentioned in pre-Abraham days in Genesis. Though many times

captured by the Egyptians, it survived to become one of the five princely cities of the Philistines, and bred the giants of the race of Anak. The Israelites never held it for long and, though it yielded to Assyria, it stood out against Alexander for five months. Thereafter its glory seems to have departed, and it passed from Greek to Roman and from Roman to Arab, Crusader and Turk, in whose hands it remained, save for a brief space when Napoleon took it, until it fell to Allenby and came beneath British control. The once splendid city is now a decayed and humble desert post, but it has a wonderful history.

At Gaza we turned East away from the coast and rose to 6,000 feet to cross the Judean mountains. It became quite cold. We flew over Bethlehem and came to Jerusalem, a pale city scattered over pale hills, with the Mosque of Omar standing out in very noticeable prominence. It was the wrong season of the year to see the Jordan at its best. It looked a mere trickle from the air, and a very poor thing after the majesty of the Nile. We picked out Jericho, which seemed to have recovered surprisingly from its sowing with salt, and got a glimpse to our right of the Dead Sea, looking very dead, forbidding and depressed; as though it could never forget that it is 1,292 feet below ordinary sea level.

Breakfast-time found us conveniently at Amman, the capital of Transjordan, where we have the Headquarters of the R.A.F. in Transjordan and Palestine and a squadron, No. 14. Rees and his brother officers gave us a very welcome meal at the mess, and were able to tell us something of their work and daily life before accompanying me on a somewhat hurried inspection of their station.

Amman has been a position of strategic importance since Roman days and earlier. The defence problem which to-day chiefly engages the attention of the Royal Air Force units in Palestine and Transjordan is essentially the same as that with which the Romans had to contend ; namely, the incursions of the desert tribes, now the Wahabi subjects of Ibn Saud of Nejd, against the settled villages on either side of the Jordan. The Romans were obliged to maintain large forces at Amman, or Philadelphia as it was then called, to deal with the situation. Many Roman remains, a well-preserved theatre and other engineering works, bear witness to the extent and permanence of their occupation.

The present forces employed to control the whole of Palestine and Transjordan and to keep the desert raiders in check consist of one Air Force Armoured Car Company at Ramleh, one bombing squadron and one section of six

JERUSALEM—SHOWING MOSQUE OF OMAR.



armoured cars at Amman, and one section of armoured cars at Ma'an. There is also an efficient force of local gendarmerie who suffice to maintain order in the mandated territory itself under normal conditions. The Air Force with this local assistance has been in successful control in these two countries for several years. On more than one occasion Wahabi raiders have been caught by aircraft and armoured cars and heavily punished. Druse insurgents, refugees from over the Syrian border, have also been a source of embarrassment from time to time; but have been kept well in hand and prevented from settling in our area to pursue their intrigues. The contrast between the small numerical strength of the forces now employed to control and protect this eastern Belgium and the large Roman garrison required to do the same work is an eloquent tribute to the effectiveness of air power; for the Romans were no mean soldiers.

The Damascus-Hejaz railway has, of course, emphasised the strategic importance which Amman has always possessed. The small force there has constantly to keep on the alert, so the camp is well entrenched and has quite a war-time appearance.

After our short halt we took the air for our long and somewhat monotonous flight across

the Syrian desert. At first the track was rather faint and difficult to discern from the height of 7,000 feet, at which we were flying ; but after it had joined the car route from Damascus it became as easy to follow as Piccadilly. This part of our flight was rather bumpy, the result of a very hot and uneven land surface, and it was curious to watch the Handley-Page slots with which our machines were fitted opening and shutting as we got into and out of the air pockets.

If somewhat dull to fly over, the country across which we were now passing is most interesting archæologically and presents problems which have not yet been solved. There is a great area of black basalt rock, freckled with light-coloured mud-pans round which you can see the remains and trace the outlines of forts and walls built by some long-forgotten race. From their characteristic shape these early encampments are known as "kites." The most recent of them are provisionally dated about 2000 B.C. ; but no one really knows how old they are, nor who built them, nor why they almost invariably follow so curious and striking an outline.

At comfortable stages all along the desert track emergency landing grounds have been marked out and numbered for easy reference. Except for the fort at Rutbah, where there is a

restaurant which does a busy trade with the car traffic, there is nothing by which any of them can be named. We reeled off the numbers steadily till we came in sight of Landing Ground V. It was then about 1.30, and we landed so as to make a slight break in our long journey and to get a little of the cramp out of our legs. There is not much room to stretch or move in the cockpit of a Wapiti.

Soon after we restarted the character of the country began to change. The ground commenced to fall away rapidly towards the basin of the great rivers and we came at length to two bituminous lakes, looking as if giant ink pots had been spilled on the sandy surface of the plain. It was a sure sign that we had entered Iraq. Within a little we reached Lake Habbania and saw Ramadi and its aerodrome, where the effluent of the lake joins the Euphrates. Finally, to crown and reward a long and tiring journey, we caught the glory of the western sun glinting on the golden domes of Khadimain.

There could be no more fitting introduction to the storied city of the Caliphs. The slender minarets and domes sheathed in beaten gold, rising from their setting of tall palms, seemed to exhale the veritable atmosphere of the Arabian Nights. We circled over Baghdad before

coming down to earth at Hinaidi aerodrome, whence we drove into the city.

Alas, it was indeed a coming down to earth, after the romantic promise of Khadimain. Romance must have departed from Baghdad with the Caliphs. To-day it is a disappointing place, and is more like a great overgrown village than the capital of the land where civilisation had its birth. To be sure, it has changed many times, even in location, since Haroun-al-Raschid wandered through its bazaars, and has undergone many vicissitudes. Even so, it has not shed altogether the heritage of those more splendid times. The fertile soil of Iraq has triumphed over Tartar and Mongol. As one walks at night along the roads leading to the city among the avenues of oleanders with which they are set, the reflections of the lights of the city mingle with the mirrored stars upon the slow-moving waters of the Tigris and recall to mind and feeling the romance of earlier days.

It is a city of contradictions, the long-garnered wealth of the mosques is set off by the noisome poverty of the close surrounding souks ; well-groomed effendis in Western dress jostle with beggars chiefly clad in sores ; green-turbaned Seyyids ride about on trams. Our arrival was in keeping with its amazing contrasts. Never have I seen a more spotless guard of honour

than that which was drawn up to meet us at Hinaidi. Never have I known a guard of honour to be paraded before anyone who presented a more dishevelled and bedraggled appearance than I did after nine hours buffeting in a Wapiti.

IX

THE LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

“ By Baghdad’s shrines of fretted gold
High walled gardens green and old.”

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

OUR first thought on landing at Hinaidi was to inquire whether the Iris had arrived. She had not. She duly reached Alexandretta on the 9th October, but was held up there for two days by low clouds on the mountains between Alexandretta and the Euphrates. However, she got away early on the 11th and made a good passage to Lake Habbania.

Meanwhile, Longmore and I, accompanied by Air Vice Marshal Sir Edward Ellington, in command of the British Forces in Iraq, had had a busy day. Before breakfast we visited the Aircraft and Engine Repair Sections and No. 30 Squadron at Hinaidi and, after breakfasting at No. 30 Squadron mess, spent the rest of the morning inspecting No. 55 and No. 70 Squadrons and the Armoured Cars. At tea-time we visited the Hospital mess and were going round the Hospital, when there was a sudden rush of all the convalescents to the river bank to see the Iris settle down like a great duck on to the Tigris. She had flown over from Lake Habbania to be ready for the morrow's journey.

I was again very pleased with all that I saw during my round of visits, and was greatly impressed by the immense size of the station at Hinaidi. Three squadrons are almost lost in it, and it must surely rank among the finest natural aerodromes in the world. I had much for which to thank Sir Edward Ellington, who was tireless in answering my many questions and in making clear to me the special problems of the work of the R.A.F. in Iraq; and much upon which to congratulate him. He was then drawing near to the end of his period of command there and was able to look forward to his return home—sadly delayed as the event turned out by an unfortunate accident from which he is now happily recovered—with the knowledge that he would leave behind him a splendid record of work done and a force in a high condition of efficiency and zeal.

Iraq was the first country in which was tried the experiment of maintaining peace and order by air power. It was an experiment that was forced upon Great Britain by the immense cost of maintaining adequate control by ground forces. It has succeeded to the utmost of our expectations. When the Royal Air Force was asked to undertake the work in 1921 the annual cost of the military system of control was over £20,000,000. The Royal Air Force



A "KITE."

undertook to carry out the work at a cost of £4,500,000 and has much more than kept its word. The present annual cost is about £1,750,000 and, if this great reduction has been made possible by the improved condition of the country in recent years, it was the R.A.F. which brought those conditions into being.

When the R.A.F. took over, the whole country was in a very disturbed state. It had just experienced a formidable insurrection, to control which had required the presence of the equivalent of some sixty battalions of troops. The situation was complicated by anxiety regarding the Northern Frontier where the Turks, with whom peace had not yet been signed, were laying claims to the vilayet of Mosul. Turkish irregulars had penetrated far into Kurdistan and the situation held many disquieting possibilities. Moreover, the Air Force was attempting something entirely new, and there were many who regarded the whole scheme with undisguised scepticism. Among the sceptics at first were some of the tribal chiefs, who refused to take air power for granted and required practical demonstration of its efficacy before they were convinced. The necessary practical demonstrations were speedily afforded them, and the sceptics were converted.

As the power of air control became more fully

realised, both by the Iraqis themselves and by the desert tribesmen, the country began to settle down ; until it became possible, not only to dispense with the British and Indian infantry battalions, but also to reduce the number of air squadrons stationed in the country. At the same time efficient local ground forces were gradually built up, capable of sharing responsibility for the defence of the air force stations and bases, and of co-operating with the aeroplanes and armoured cars in the larger expeditions. The result has been that to-day there are only five squadrons in Iraq, instead of the eight with which we started.

Now that the Mosul frontier question has been satisfactorily settled, the chief defence problem in Iraq, as at Amman, is the prevention of the incursions of Wahabi raiders, from Nejd across the desert boundary. The first essential for this work is quick action. The raiders invariably act with great swiftness ; very little warning is ever given and, unless met by a promptness and mobility at least as great as their own, the attackers have usually attained their object and are back again and scattered to their homes in the desert beyond the frontier before anything effective can be done either to stop or punish them. In the case of Iraq formal punitive expeditions across the frontier, such as have been

so frequent during the past half-century and more on the frontiers of India, would stir up all sorts of political trouble the consequences of which it would be difficult to foresee. Moreover, if Indian experience is any guide, such expeditions, unless followed by permanent occupation, are usually barren of results, other than the deepening of old or the creation of fresh animosities. The despatch of a column of all arms into a little known and hostile country is always a costly business, both in men and money. Though the enemy's villages be burned and his stock, it may be, destroyed or driven off, it is usually a matter of great difficulty to bring the actual offenders to book. The expedition withdraws, losing many men to snipers on the way, and the enemy returns to his burnt-out homesteads filled with a consuming desire to get his own back.

The methods and effect of air action are quite different. At the first rumour that tribesmen are collecting in some convenient centre behind the frontier, the nearest air forces are on the alert. Friendly herdsmen, searching for grazing for their flocks on the desert outskirts, bring swift warning that a raiding party is on the move. Within an hour machines are in the air and, if the raiders are not met and stopped before reaching their objective, the odds are that they are caught

and dispersed while still striving to take their booty back into their country. Probably but few casualties are inflicted on them ; yet they return to their homes with the knowledge that their raid has been a failure, and that there is nothing that they can do which will secure that other raids will not be equal failures. Gradually the lesson sinks in. Though they may not have lost many men, the few men lost have died to no purpose. They are filled, not with a spirit of anger and revenge, but with a conviction of impotence.

Or it may be that no warning has been given of the raid, and that some lonely village or police post has been overwhelmed and its occupants butchered. In such case the punishment can be made to fit the crime. Late in 1927 a desert police post was cut off in this way, and the Iraqi grazing tribes raided and robbed of their cattle. The R.A.F. patrols, though too late to save the police, caught one of the raiding parties while its members were actually distributing their spoil, and inflicted a very sharp lesson upon them. It is too much, perhaps, to expect that such elusive people as the Wahabis, to whom raiding has for generations been almost a national sport, will easily be persuaded to abandon the practice altogether. Yet, if there are any means by which the raiders can be taught that the game is not

worth the candle, undoubtedly they are the methods which the Royal Air Force in Iraq is employing.

It should be noted, too, that the action of the Air Force in Iraq becomes steadily more effective from year to year, as greater experience is acquired and bombing becomes more accurate. The bomb is, indeed, already a weapon of precision and bombing sights are still improving. It is also a weapon which is very readily adaptable to different types of target. Its employment is relatively cheap; for the actual flying must be done in any case, whether against Wahabi raiders or on practice flights, if the efficiency of the Air Force is to be maintained. Iraq is a comparatively small country of about three times the size of England, and all parts of it can be reached in a few hours' flying from the regular air stations. It is, therefore, a simple and inexpensive matter to bring the requisite force speedily upon the field of action. All that is needed is good organisation and prompt decision to act.

At the end of my day's inspection of the Hinaidi air station, and after my conversations with Ellington and other officers, there was left no room for doubt in my mind that for a country like Iraq Air Force control is the ideal method. Nor was there left much doubt that it is a

method capable of successful application in many others parts of the Empire, where communications are long and difficult and recalcitrant tribes have to be persuaded into the ways of peace and order. I had seen these same methods being used in their early stages in the Sudan. I began to look forward more eagerly than ever to discovering how they were applied in India.

I was not so fully occupied with my inspections that I had no time, before we resumed our journey on the 12th, to see something of Baghdad itself and to absorb some of the spirit of this strange and wonderful country. Little time, indeed, is needed ; for Iraq takes you by the throat the moment you enter it, saturated as it is with history and legend, religion and fable. I quickly began to understand the hold the country had taken upon Sir Percy Cox and Miss Gertrude Bell, and to sympathise with the devoted service they gave to Iraq and its people. One can scarcely estimate to-day the results which their work and influence must have upon the future of the country ; but, even in the course of so short a stay as I had made, I felt that they must be lasting and beneficent.

If Iraq has been fortunate in her British servants she has been fortunate also in her King. I went to see King Faisal. He was very charming, and is an excellent French

scholar, in spite of his modest disclaimers. I drank coffee with him in his unpretentious audience room, outside the windows of which the Tigris idly flows and, while we talked, watched the black melon boats (guffas I discovered they were called) waddling slowly by.

Ellington had fetched me for my round in his snow-white Rolls-Royce and took me back to the Residency, where I was staying with the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Dobbs, who made me thoroughly at home both on my outward and on my return journey. The Residency is in a delightful situation on the banks of the Tigris. There is a fountain always playing in the hall and a garden full of flowers, with a real *English* lawn. Sir Henry Dobbs sits there under the shade of his chenar tree, the oriental plane. There, with the boats passing on the river and the sights and sounds of Baghdad all around one, the golden road to Samarkand appears to be a far more real thing than it can ever seem amid all the trappings of His Majesty's.

Before dinner, I found time for a hurried visit to the museum which is full of entrancing things from the excavations at Ur and elsewhere. I had come from Khartum to Baghdad in three days, staying a day at Cairo on the way, and my mind was full of the antiquities of Egypt. Yet

here were the products of a by-gone civilisation no less interesting than those of Egypt. I had seen the treasures found at Ur which were on view at the British Museum last year, and had admired their perfect taste and beauty. Here was a collection yet more extensive, and certain to be added to year by year as the excavations are continued.

It is impossible that these wonderful examples of ancient art will remain long as little known and sought after as they are to-day. When The Third Route to India, which Imperial Airways has just opened, becomes more generally used ; when land communications are improved by bridge and railway and proper hotel accommodation is provided in Iraq, as it is in Egypt, Baghdad must eventually become an immense tourist centre. Then it will be as thronged as are Cairo and Luxor by visitors drawn by the discoveries of the excavators, by the strange charm of an oriental city and the delights of a perfect winter climate. Not that the summer climate at Baghdad would seem to be really trying, for I was told that the English children born there stand the climate very well all the year round, and they certainly look as healthy and robust as one could wish.

Egypt has too long had a monopoly of those who wish to winter out of England and to go

further afield than the Riviera. One wonders what will come from the widening of knowledge and ideas which is bound to follow, in the course of the next generation, as a result of the extended use of air communications. Baghdad will have her full share in that development, and it may be that a new day of splendour is dawning for that ancient city.

A bathe in the warm waters of the Tigris prepared me for dinner at the Residency. The King came to dine with us, wearing the high, dark blue forage cap which is rapidly becoming the national headdress in Baghdad, especially among the young bloods. But it takes more than dress to change the spirit of a place with a history so ancient, and who would want it changed? I must revise my opinion of Baghdad. Parts of it certainly are rather dirty and, with the exception of the mosques, there are few buildings which repay a second glance; but it still preserves the atmosphere of days long past.

It had been a full day indeed. To-morrow Basra, via Ur and Babylon. I felt very fit and well.

X
SINDBAD'S CITY

"Do you know the story I brought
back from Basra—a story sweeter
than dates?"

Sa'di's "Bustan"; 1257.

CHAPTER X

SINDBAD'S CITY

IT is a mere 300 miles from Baghdad to Basra, so we were able to start at what was, for us, the late hour of a little after 8 a.m. The Iris, anxious to get back to her proper element, had left an hour earlier; closely hugging the course of the Tigris, as being the best available substitute for the sea. A Vickers Victoria troop-carrier, probably one of the very machines which have since so successfully effected the dramatic air rescues of Europeans from Kabul, had been detailed to take us to Basra by the Euphrates route. In one respect it would have been better had we also started earlier; for after about 9.30 a.m. the desert heats up so much that one gets rather a gruelling, unless flying too high to obtain a good view of the many interesting places en route.

The Victoria was a great improvement upon the Wapiti as regards comfortable travelling. It is possible really to take one's ease upon the seats, and there is plenty of room inside the big fuselage to move about. The Victoria had the advantage over the Iris that she was

independent of the river. In addition, therefore, to seeing Babylon and Ur on the way, I was able to see something of the outskirts of the desert proper and so get a much better idea of the sort of country over which the R.A.F. in Iraq have to operate than I should have done had we been tied down to a river. In recent years most of the trouble in Iraq has come from the desert tribes South and West of the Euphrates.

Before leaving the Tigris we passed over Ctesiphon and got a fine view of the great arch and wall fragment, which are now all that stand of the old Parthian winter capital. Not much older than some of our own Saxon crypts and a mere *parvenu* compared with the Ziggurat at Ur, the gigantic brick-built arch and pilastered wall constitute the most splendid example of Sassanian architecture extant. They are fitly known even to-day as "Takhti Khesra," the Throne of Chosroes. Then for a time we had both the Tigris and the Euphrates in sight, till we reached the latter river at the ruins of Babylon. Longmore's comment was that the place looked like a dust-heap, and I was fain to confess that all that was left of "that great city" was not impressive from the air. A huge heap of mud and rubble, mud brick and burnt brick dissolving into dust, is all that remains of the world-famed Hanging Gardens which

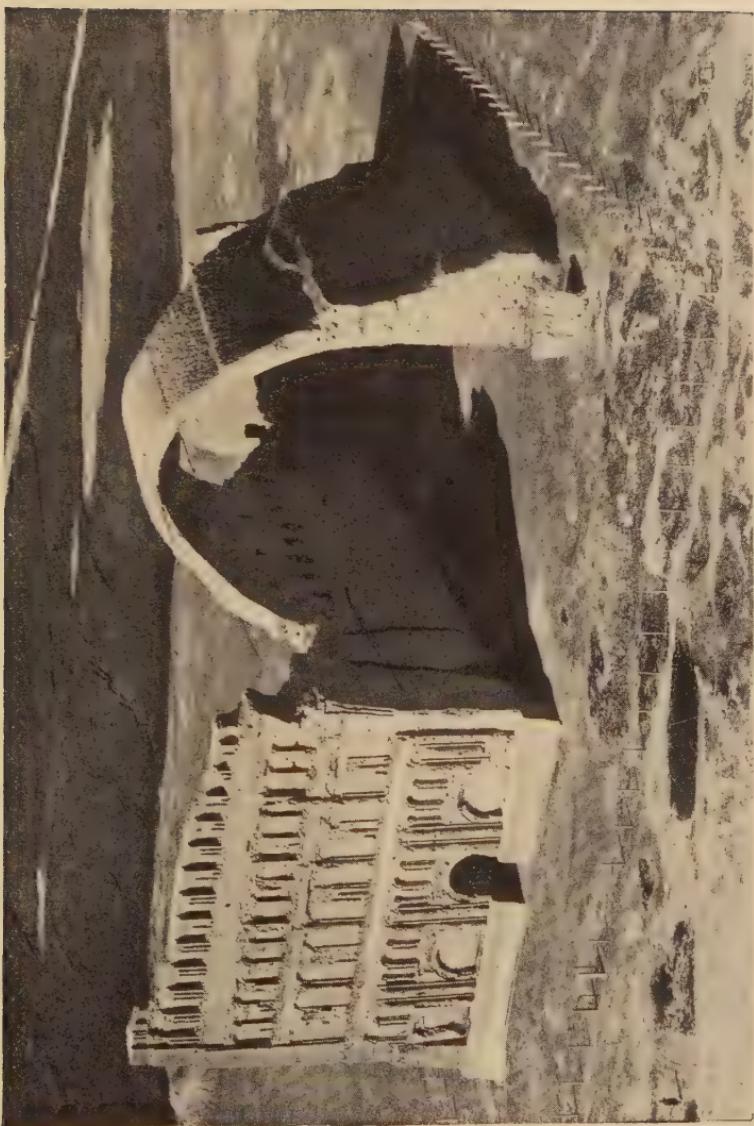
Nebuchadnezzar built for his Median Queen to remind her of her native mountains. To-day the only sign of human occupation is the small pale blue mosque which crowns the mound of Amran.

Nebuchadnezzar was a convinced believer in the virtues of advertisement. I was told that every other brick that one picks up among the ruins bears his name in cuneiform. He has managed to imprint it almost as clearly upon the minds of generations of British children ; but the Babylon which he rebuilt dates from no further back than 600 B.C. ; whereas Babylon rose to power and greatness nearly 2,000 years earlier. Besides being a great soldier, victor over the Egyptians, conqueror of Syria and overlord of Tyre and Jerusalem, he was a mighty builder of palaces, walls, temples and canals. He brought a new, brief era of prosperity to Babylon ; but to make room for his incessant building operations he cleared away what Sennacherib had left of structures of a far older period and overlaid their sites with his advertising bricks. If Babylon was the city of that greatest of all Ziggurats, the Biblical Tower of Babel, no trace of the work remains. It is in the more ancient city of Ur that we must look for the best example of the most characteristic feature of Sumerian town-planning. The Ziggurat at Ur

is still in a state of preservation sufficient to enable one to reconstruct a picture of the whole with a very fair degree of accuracy.

It was under the law-giver Hammurabi and his successors that Babylon experienced her greatest splendours, though even then too late to furnish the finest examples of Sumerian art. Hammurabi subdued Elam, that constant scourge of the river cities, and brought all Sumer under the sway of Akkad. Babylon became the centre and capital of the united kingdoms. It was in the long-crumbled temple of Amran at Babylon that was found the stele of laws which Hammurabi drew up for the observance of the many mingled races that owed him allegiance. So great became the prestige of "the city of cities" that for many centuries, though military predominance passed to other dynasties, no claimant to the overlordship of Western Asia was thought fully to have established his position, until he had taken the hands of Bel Marduk, the supreme god of Babylon, and had been accepted as his son.

Till the final destruction of its defences by Darius and Xerxes, Babylon remained the holy city of Western Asia, though political power had left it. The worshippers who passed through the Ishtar Gate, which Nebuchadnezzar adorned with enamelled tiles and sculptures of



CTESIPHON.

lions, dragons and bulls, were following in the footsteps of countless generations who had passed before them up the Processional Way to the sacred temple of Marduk the Creator.

Before going on to Ur we turned away from the river towards the desert and passed over the city which has gathered Babylon's heritage and is to-day the holiest in Iraq. Najaf is an extraordinarily picturesque sight from the air; a sort of Chu Chin Chow Carcassonne. Crowded together within the circumference of the many-bastioned walls which form its protection against the desert raiders, is a mass of houses and narrow streets. In their midst, surrounded by many lesser blue-green domes of tombs and mosques—a golden jewel in a turquoise setting—rises the lofty dome of beaten gold which crowns the central mosque wherein is buried Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. Najaf is to the Shiah sect of Mahomedans what Mecca is to the Sunnis. Almost the whole of the peasant classes of Iraq are Shi'ites and one of the chief problems of Iraq, which must somehow be solved if Iraq is to reap the full benefit of its new-found independence, is to reconcile the Shi'ites with the Sunni upper class, so that all can co-operate as a united people for the common welfare.

At Najaf live the chief Mujtahids, or Popes, of the Shiah sect, whose religious law runs in

all Shiah countries. Beneath the golden dome, besides the bones of Ali, are vast treasures of gold and silver and precious stones, carpets and ornaments of all kinds ; offerings of the pilgrims of centuries, or payments for the privilege of burial in the holy soil of Najaf. The ambition of every devout Shi'ite is to be buried at Najaf, as near to the tomb of Ali as possible. There is a regular tariff for graves, ranging from those within the precincts of the Mosque to those in the cemeteries without the walls. The strange thing is that, in all the years that bodies have been brought there for burial, the cemeteries have not grown particularly large ; but it is said that in due course Ali removes the buried dead to make room for others !

Najaf is less happily known as the home of Shiah intrigue and has a factious lower class which is a fertile soil for plots and mischief of all kinds. It was here that Captain Marshall was murdered in cold blood in 1918 and that the rising of 1920 was principally hatched. Here, too, the pilgrim arriving at the holy city can as a matter of course, by recognised legal form and without public odium of any sort, acquire for a few rupees a temporary wife for the period of his stay, much in the manner described by the old classical historians when writing of the customs of Babylon.

As we passed the disused aerodrome at Samawah on our way to Ur, we began to feel the full effects of the waves of heat rising from the desert; and the Victoria started to roll with a slow twisting motion, like a ship at sea. Some of us became rather thoughtful; but soon we had Ur to distract our attention for a while. The great mound of the Ziggurat by its very bulk still retains something of its former majesty, and the excavations which Mr. Leonard Woolley is carrying on showed up quite clearly. On my homeward journey I was to have the great good fortune to be taken over them by Mr. Woolley himself.

Within the hour after passing Ur, Shaibah came in sight, where No. 84 Squadron is stationed. We landed on the aerodrome, walked round the station with Flight Lieut. Lock, the acting O.C., and lunched in the mess, where we were regaled on Basra sole, a well-known local delicacy. One of the officers there, Flight Lieutenant Barrett, had just got his D.S.O. for picking up under fire two pilots whose machines had made forced landings in the course of the Akhwan operations. After lunch we went on by air to the Basra landing ground, a short ten minutes' flight, and visited the three Armoured Car sections which were stationed there temporarily, under Squadron

Leader Godsave, in view of further possible trouble with the Akhwan. From the Armoured Cars we went on to the depot on the river, where we were pleased to see the Iris riding at anchor between the palm-fringed banks. The depot was now closed down, but was in charge of a care and maintenance party who looked after our needs very well. We dined at Basra with the Administrative Inspector, Mr. Jardine, who was my kind host for the night. He helped me through an interview with the Governor of the Province, who could speak no English, but was very full of a holiday in London, Munich, Vienna and Paris, from which he had just returned. It chanced that King Faisal's A.D.C. was visiting his date farm at Basra and he sent me a splendid basket of those most famous of all dates, so we were well provided against emergencies.

Set at the head of the Persian Gulf on land built up upon the old sea bed by the deposited silt of the great rivers, Sindbad's city is a charming Arab Venice, full of creeks and canals along which pale blue gondolas thread the universal date farms. These are everywhere, the fertile soil and abundant moisture making for wonderful growth, and in the spring peach trees blossom beneath the palms. Dates and barley were grown in Sumer before the Flood.

Sargon brought figs and vines and roses back from his campaigns in Asia Minor. Rice is now cultivated in quantity. In so fertile a soil, indeed, any plant that can accommodate itself to a hot sun and abundant water flourishes luxuriantly. Still it is by the date palm that Basra lives. "Bless the date trees," says the Prophet, "for they are your aunts."

XI

THE PERSIAN COAST

“ In a country destitute of trees even
the castor oil plant passes for a
tree.”

Hitopadesa; Persian. VIII Century MSS.

CHAPTER XI

THE PERSIAN COAST

TO get a big flying boat into the air from Basra seaplane station is no easy matter, unless the wind happens to be just right. The river opposite Cole Island is rather narrow, and there is quite a lot of traffic of one sort or another. On this occasion we had a cross-wind, which was not at all what we wanted; but Scott managed to find a way through the many boats with which the river was crowded and, after a run of a full mile, in the end took off very well.

We followed the main stream of the Shatt al' Arab down to the Gulf, getting from the air as we did so the only properly complete view of the port that can ever be obtained. There are so many river bends and winding creeks and lanes that nowhere on land or water can one see more than a small fraction of the place. The main stream of the river is full of islands shaped like a Persian palm and all of them covered with dates; but the fresh water finds its way to the sea across a wide area of true delta formation, and much of what seems to be the real bank of the river is in fact surrounded by some

twisting waterway. It is a great country for all kinds of water fowl. Huge flocks of pelicans, disturbed at their work of getting their morning meal, rose into lumbering flight on our approach, dropping as they did so silver showers of fish from their overladen pouches.

We passed the great oil refinery at Abadan, its many storage tanks set out in ordered rows and looking like miniature gasometers. Each tank has a mound around it, separating it from its neighbours, so that a leak of oil can easily be kept within bounds. The bar off Abadan Island showed as a white line of surf beneath us, and we entered the Gulf itself on the first stage of our long sea passage to Karachi. Bushire, the principal port of Persia, came into view and slipped by to the North of us. With its white stone buildings it looks from the air a very tidy town, and there are a number of nice houses on its outskirts. I am told that its appearance belies it, and that closer inspection would reveal the usual smells and dirt in an unusually concentrated form. It is, however, the headquarters of the British Naval Squadron in the Persian Gulf, so no doubt there are parts of the town which are tolerable.

Beyond Bushire the mountains draw nearer to the coast which becomes wild and inhospitable to an extraordinary degree and continues with

little change all the way to Karachi. It is a truly ferocious country and, from the height of 3,400 feet at which we were flying, could be seen in all its cruel nakedness to a great distance inland. The formation is peculiar. The general impression is not that of a mountainous country, such as one is accustomed to in the Alps or Himalayas, but of a wide level plain on which are set, in a series of successive lines one behind the other and running parallel to each other and the coast, range upon range of sharp-edged mountains. The whole coast country looked like the vast interior of the jaws of a gigantic shark, gnashing its teeth at us as we flew past.

In between the ranges are wide stretches of level ground, upon which it would be a simple matter to construct aerodromes ; while a number of fjord-like inlets and the sheltered surface of occasional lagoons would make admirable emergency stopping-places for flying boats. From Bushire to Bandar Abbas some of the flat areas are swampy and grow most of the firewood used in the Persian Gulf; but by selecting the stages carefully it is quite possible to find suitable sites for all the landing grounds likely to be required for a regular coastal air service. Except for these areas of swamp the whole country, level plain and saw-toothed mountain ridges alike, is destitute of water and devoid of

all vegetation. Only on the coast line are occasional fringes of palms. Beyond them scarce a vestige of green relieves the brilliantly coloured strata of the highly mineralised rocks of which the mountains are composed.

If the shores of the Gulf are barren, the coastal waters produce crops of great value. The pearl fisheries of the Persian Gulf have been worked since the days of the Macedonians, and the methods employed would seem to have changed not at all in the interval. The divers work in pairs, ten or a dozen forming the crew of small sailing boats which go out in great fleets of sixty or seventy vessels. Armed with an iron-wood spike as a protection against sharks, and further insured by the incantations of a shark-charmer, naked except for a girdle to which to attach his basket, the diver descends to the bottom with the aid of a great stone tied to the line to which he clings. A clip on the nose does duty for a diving dress, and so equipped a good diver may remain down for as long as eighty seconds, filling his basket with oysters. It is a most exhausting profession, and most divers die young; for they are to all intents and purposes slaves, and have to pay for their wretched winter keep by diving all the summer.

The chief centre of the Gulf pearl fisheries and the most important group of banks are on the

other side of the Gulf to that which we followed, around the Bahrein Islands. The Sheik of Bahrein lives on an island which is remarkable for getting its fresh water supply from springs which rise out of the sea bed itself beneath the salt waters of the Gulf. He makes a very good thing out of the fisheries, for each of the 400 boats which work them at these islands has to pay a tax to him.

We were getting along nicely in what appeared to be a dead calm and decided to carry on without refuelling to Henjam, where we were to stop the night. We had met Captain Boyes, the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf, at dinner at Basra, and he had kindly arranged for us to sleep on one of his sloops, H.M.S. Crocus, which was then calling at Henjam, so we knew that we should be well looked after there. All seemed to be going smoothly, when, as we approached the islands which stud the eastern end of the Gulf, where it narrows to the Strait of Ormuz, the starboard engine began to give a few coughs. It proceeded to drop to 1,600 revolutions and got no better; but with the other two engines running well we carried on without difficulty or disquiet, till we got to Henjam and landed in waters sheltered by great hills rising sheer out of the sea. The Crocus was there, and we were most hospitably entertained

by Commander Bell-Salter and his officers. The trouble with the starboard engine proved to be a broken camshaft housing. Things looked for the moment rather hopeless, but the Royal Navy is not to be defeated by a thing like that. The artificers on board the Crocus got busy at once and, after working all night, produced a complete new housing in cast brass which fitted admirably.

Meanwhile Commander Bell-Salter, Longmore and I went ashore to the far side of the island, and throwing off our cares and our clothes had a most enjoyable bathe in shallow water. It was my first experience of bathing in a tropic sea and I found it almost too hot ; but very pleasant all the same. While we were in the water native fishermen were busy all round us with their hand nets, which they threw with surprising accuracy over shoals of mullet that sprang out of the water like flights of swallows.

We dined, as we had lunched, on the sloop and were entertained with stories of the Gulf, pearl-fishing, gun-running and the like, until it was time to turn in. It was a terribly hot and sticky night. The men sleep all about the deck in hammocks and there was an awning on deck for the officers ; but there was too much moisture that night for the awning to be possible, so we stewed in cabins.

It was a flat calm on the morning of the 15th October, without a breath of wind to help us into the air. We tried three times and failed to leave the water ; but the fourth attempt was successful. We skimmed past the Crocus, and replied gratefully to the farewells waved to us by officers and men who lined the side of the ship, looking so cool and efficient in their white linen uniforms. I dare say that they were relieved to see us really off, for at one time it had looked as though we might remain on their hands indefinitely.

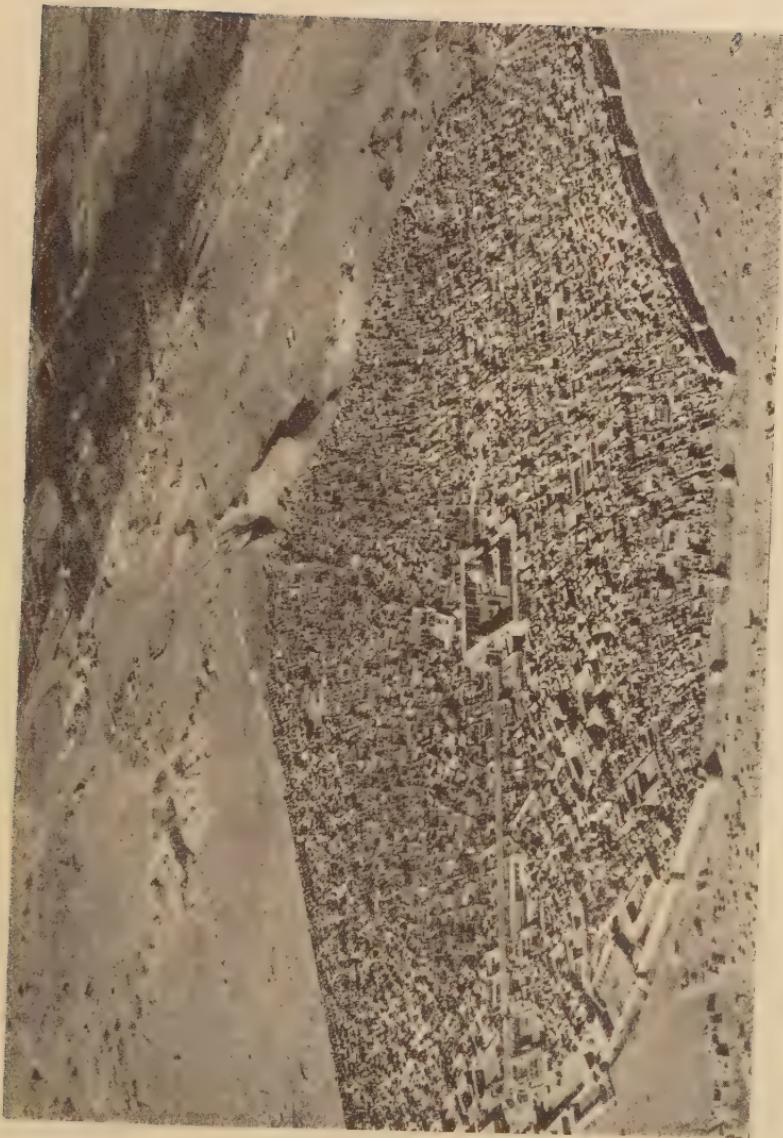
The repaired engine was doing its duty nobly, and for two hours everything seemed to be going well. We passed above a cloud belt, admiring the effects it gave of light and shade, and were nearing Jask, when without warning the starboard engine dropped again to 1,600 revolutions and it was clear that we must land. We circled over Jask, while we sent out wireless messages to Karachi, and then came down into the bay. It turned out that the camshaft covering so skillfully improvised had been secured with copper rivets instead of steel grub screws, and that the rivets had drawn or broken. It was a small point which the naval artificers could not have been expected to appreciate, and we were glad that it was no worse. It was a comparatively simple matter for Sergeant Cronkshaw to

fashion suitable rivets out of some bar steel, which providentially was at hand, and by the next morning the cover was in place again and as good as ever.

Jask is quite a pretty place, set on a long thin promontory jutting out into the sea from an amphitheatre of splendid hills. It consists of a few palms, a few casuarina trees with long, green, whip-like branches, a few banyan trees, the offices of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, a handful of Persians, and millions upon millions of crabs. The latter have honey-combed the rocks all along the seashore with regular crab castles, whence they issue in innumerable battalions.

It was much more pleasant at Jask than at Henjam ; not so hot and steamy, but with a nice, cool, South-East wind blowing. We had another bathe, but one does not venture out more than a few feet from the shore, as the sharks thereabouts are particularly hungry and pushing. By the time one has listened to all the warnings and injunctions of the local people, one has the idea when bathing that one is ringed round by these monsters, snapping at one like dogs ; but no doubt the local people know what they are talking about, and I kept close inshore.

We slept out the night very comfortably on



NAJAF

the roof of Mr. Thomson's house, where it was delightfully fresh and cool. I was roused, in time to see the sun rise above the Persian hills, by the call of the Muezzin and by the crowing and cackling of Mr. Thomson's cocks and hens. These heralds of the dawn become vocal almost simultaneously, and I could not tell which won ; but it was 4.45 a.m. and time to get up and prepare for the final stage of our journey to India. Mr. Thomson is the Superintendent in charge of the Telegraph Department Station and lives in a well-built and comfortable house provided with electric light and fans. He came out in a boat to greet us as soon as we arrived and contrived to make our enforced visit a very pleasant one.

We were in the air again a few minutes after 6 a.m. We had cancelled our appeals for help from Karachi, as soon as we discovered that Sergeant Cronkshaw would be able to effect the necessary repairs himself. I was very pleased to think that we should be able to complete our journey out in the Iris. We rose speedily to 4,000 feet, putting on more and more clothes as we got higher, and flew steadily eastwards above scattered clouds. The repaired engine showed no signs of distress whatever, and we confidently left behind us Charbar, where is one of the possible landing grounds on the

Basra-Karachi route. The town is on the eastern point of a bay which appears to be remarkably well sheltered.

We had a second breakfast of sardines, tinned peaches and tea, and hoped that nothing would occur to disturb the peace and quiet of our passage. Ras Arubah, looking like a miniature Gibraltar, came in sight and passed rapidly behind us ; and Gwadar Bay, where we could have refuelled had we thought it necessary. But we were going strong and roared along the wicked-looking Makran Coast in great form. At Pasni we picked up the Hinaidi which had been sent out from Karachi in case of need, and raced along together, we over the sea and she just inland. The sea hereabouts contained areas of some oily-looking substance in all sorts of colours and curious streaks. We took it to be fish spawn, but learned later that according to a native tradition there is an active volcano under the sea off Gwadar.

The Baluchistan Coast is a long line of sand with hills and mountains a short distance inland. Scott now became very busy taking bearings and fussing round generally. Soon afterwards Karachi came in view and I got my first sight of India. Our repairs had held out splendidly.

We made a good descent in Karachi Harbour and went ashore, where we were met by Air

Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Salmond, commanding the R.A.F. in India, the Acting Governor, and quite a small crowd of other officials. We were taken to Government House, which stands in a garden glowing with pink cannas, where I found awaiting me a telegram of welcome from the Viceroy.

XII

'PLANE TALES FROM THE HILLS

" Fly like a winged hart or roe,
Over the hills where the spices grow."

CHAPTER XII

'PLANE TALES] FROM THE HILLS

WE were fresher than we should have been had we flown the whole distance from Henjam to Karachi in a single stage, and after a much needed bathe were ready to take part in the dinner and dance which had been arranged in our honour. It was a very kindly welcome to India.

Next morning we got up early to see the depot and the great new airship shed. The latter is an immense structure. Seen here at what must one day take rank as one of the chief air ports of the Empire, it brought home to me a vivid realisation of the fact that the airship is destined to be in the near future a most important factor in the development of the Empire's air communications. Close by, the new mooring-mast was creeping up skywards; as yet unfinished, but already well advanced.

The strength of the air forces maintained in India is necessarily determined to a considerable extent by the facilities for reinforcing them speedily from outside. The openings for the use of aircraft, both civil and military, over

the vast land spaces of India are, however, so enormous that it seems possible that the Indian air establishments will increase. Until the beginning of the present year six squadrons of the R.A.F. were stationed in India, two of them equipped with bombers and four with army co-operation machines. This year two additional bombing squadrons have been sent out, bringing the total to eight squadrons, most of which are on the North-West Frontier.

When just before the close of the third Afghan War a British aeroplane delivered a bombing attack upon Kabul, a new era was opened in the defence of India. Since that time the use of aircraft for defence purposes along the frontier has increased from year to year, and of more recent years in particular has been attended by marked success in the control of the semi-civilised regions which border on our Indian Empire. As in Iraq, the economy in money resulting from the use of aircraft for those purposes has already been enormous, and the saving in lives both to ourselves and to the delinquent tribes has been scarcely less great.

The advantage of employing air power has been emphasised by the change that has taken place in the present century in the conditions under which punitive expeditions against the North-West Frontier tribes have to be con-

ducted. In the past we relied for the success of our operations and the keeping down of casualties upon the superiority of our infantry weapons, backed by such light artillery as could be transported in such mountainous country, and upon our superior fighting tactics. Since the Great War modern rifles and ammunition have found their way to the tribes across the frontier in large quantity, while from long experience the fighting men of the tribes have learnt to copy our tactics. Aided by their greater mobility and knowledge of the terrain, they have made the task of punitive expeditions more difficult and costly in every way.

To descend for a moment to figures—during the last twenty years of the past century the actual cost of campaigns along the frontier amounted to some £300,000. In the first twenty years of the present century the financial cost mounted to nearly £20,000,000. Of this extraordinary increase, the greater part took place in the last few years of the period. The year 1920 alone accounted for £16,000,000, including the cost of the third Afghan War. Formerly a force of a few thousand men of all arms was sufficient to carry through an expedition to success. In 1919-1920 it required an army of 45,000 fighting men, with nearly as many non-combatants for supply and other

auxiliary services, to deal adequately with the trouble in Waziristan.

Anything that offers any possibility of reducing these huge and growing figures deserves earnest consideration and full experiment. Already sufficient experience has been gained of the use of air power to demonstrate that the proper employment of aeroplanes definitely constitutes a practicable, cheap and effective alternative method of dealing with most contingencies. It is not only in the first cost that the saving and advantage come. As in Roman days, so to-day, the road is the best of all policemen. Roads bring trade and prosperity, and trade and prosperity a change of habits and a growing appreciation of the arts of peace and of the advantages of order and good government. Since there is never at any time, and least of all to-day, more than a certain, limited amount of money available for the building of roads, every penny spent on costly military expeditions causes delay in the opening up of the country to trade. It means a postponement of the day when the frontier tribes will settle down naturally to ways of peace; when they will use their superior energy for the commercial exploitation of the inhabitants of the plains and, like the Scots in their dealings with the English, abandon raids in favour of big business. Every penny saved

by the employment of air power means more money for roads and brings nearer the establishment of lasting peace and order on the frontier.

Striking examples of the effectiveness of air action on the Indian frontier were afforded in 1925 and 1927, in dealing with trouble among the Mahsuds in the one case and the Mohmands in the other. The trouble with the Mahsuds had been of long standing and, after four years of intermittent operations with land forces, the Abdur Rahman Khel were still standing out in undisguised and apparently invincible hostility. The Air Force was brought in, and within a very few weeks the recalcitrant tribesmen gave up the struggle. This they did, although the casualties inflicted upon them by the air attacks were trifling, far less than must have been caused by land action. It was the moral effect of attack from the air which forced them to yield. They could not hold out longer against the constant interference with the routine of their daily life, the daily interruption of their usual habits. They realised that, so long as they stood out, air action would go on and that they could do nothing to stop it. So for the sake of peace and quietness the half-savage tribesmen, who very probably had never before regarded peace and quietness as particularly desirable, bowed to the inevitable.

Very much the same thing happened with the Mohmands. News came in good time of the route which the lashkars were taking and our ground forces took up positions to stop them. The lashkars very naturally did not come that way. They preferred to stay in country where ground troops could not get at them without inviting heavy casualties. They had not reckoned with the Air Force. A very few bombing attacks convinced them that there was no place to which they could retreat where the aeroplanes could not reach them and render their life miserable. Though once more the actual casualties inflicted were trifling, they decided to acknowledge defeat ; the lashkars dispersed and the tribesmen returned to their villages.

I was to learn more and in more detail in the course of a few days, when I went the round of our frontier air stations and saw the units of the R.A.F. on the North-West Frontier engaged on their daily tasks. Before I got there, however, I was to obtain some idea of the possibilities of the other side of aviation in India. I was to be brought to realise by my own personal experience, brief as it was, that the whole of the sub-continent is crying aloud for the development of commercial air lines, mail routes, passenger services, and the many forms of commercial air transport. I imagine that one

may travel through the length and breadth of India by train and appreciate dimly in the course of long nights and days in stuffy railway carriages that it is a very big country. Fly a few thousand miles across India by air, and you will get a far clearer and more lively idea of its vastness ; and of the inadequacy, judged by modern standards, of a commercial system which in such a country still depends upon surface communications. It may be possible in England for an indifferently speedy aeroplane to race the Flying Scotsman to the Border and win only by a few minutes. In the long cross-country journeys of India the slowest aeroplane can give a train a matter of days and a beating.

I was glad to find that, not only among Europeans but among the ruling native classes, air-mindedness is decidedly upon the increase in India. There is in being, or at least in process of commencement, a movement towards the establishment of a proper network of air lines, serving all India. In so huge a country there ought seldom to be any real difficulty in providing adequate landing grounds. Once they are established, the development will speedily gather momentum. It will not be long, I hope, before the extension of The Third Route from Karachi to Calcutta and Rangoon shows the way.

The course planned out for my own journey lay over little more than a single corner of India ; yet it involved flying some 2,500 miles. In no other way could I have covered so great a distance and put in so considerable an amount of work, apart from my brief holiday at Simla, in the short space of eight days. In no other way could I have seen so much of India in the time, in such comfort, and with so entire an absence of fatigue. Granted that upon occasion, when flying over the scorching deserts of the plains or among the towering mountains of the frontier, there was more movement in the machine than was altogether pleasant. Even so, such moments did not last long. Occasional internal qualms, they amounted to no more, were a small price to pay for the constant succession of glorious views and most interesting sights which marked our journey and made the time actually spent in the air seem even shorter than it really was.

It may help to emphasise my meaning if I give a summary of my route, and of the land mileage involved. Our flying mileage was somewhat longer than the direct route overland, as we did not always follow the nearest line. On the 16th October we flew from Karachi to Jodhpur, a distance of 380 land miles. On the following day we flew from

Jodhpur to Ambala, via Delhi, 420 miles. From Ambala we went by train and light railway to Simla and Lahore, travelling by night. Night travel is the one advantage that the railway at present has over air transport. It is an advantage which it will not keep for long. On the 20th October we flew from Lahore to Peshawar, 230 miles. On the 21st October I was taken in a Bristol Fighter round the stations centred on Peshawar, up the Khyber Pass and over a wide sector of the frontier. The first stage of our return journey was from Peshawar to Quetta, 400 miles, and the final stage one of 425 miles from Quetta to Karachi.

These distances are by no means remarkable from the flying point of view; but if covered by rail, they would represent many long and weary hours in a hot and dusty train, at the end of which I should have had neither time nor inclination for anything but bed. As we covered them, they took up but a small portion of the day. They were spent for the most part in delightful coolness and comfort and left me with several hours each day to get through my work and with ample energy to do it.

XIII

“ THE BIRD’S NEST ”

“ Where in sunshine reaching out,
Eastern cities miles about,
Are with mosque and minaret
Among sandy gardens set.”

CHAPTER XIII

"THE BIRD'S NEST"

GEOFFREY SALMOND had provided G a Hinaiidi for our tour of India, and had arranged for us to start at 11 a.m., so as to give us reasonable time to recover from the exhausting effects of our enthusiastic welcome to India. As it turned out we had a longer rest than we anticipated, for something went wrong at the last minute with the gas starter to the starboard engine (it would be the starboard engine) of the Hinaiidi. The starter from the port engine (the Hinaiidi has a pair of Jupiter VIII's) had to be moved over, and this caused a delay of the best part of two hours.

However, we had not far to go, a mere 380 miles, and we were in the air soon after 12.30 p.m. Meanwhile our escort of three D.H.9a's had gone on ahead, in order to refuel at Hyderabad and be in the air again to meet us there. The greater part of our route lay over the Sind Desert; but we had the line of the Rajputana Railway to guide us all the way, so there was no difficulty in keeping our course. We crossed the great stream of the Indus and came to

Hyderabad, a well-laid-out and fine-looking town, where we duly picked up our escort.

Then followed a rather dreary flight across the desert, not at all the sort of country one expects to find in India. It was rather illuminating to have brought home to one so soon, in fact, that so vast a stretch of barrenness could be tucked away in a corner of India, its existence almost forgotten in the popular conception of the tropical climate and the luxuriant vegetation of the peninsula. It was interesting, too, to observe how the cultivated areas clustered about the river and the canal systems, some of the latter apparently very ancient, others the modern work of British engineers, and to compare the Indus with the Nile and the river civilisations of Iraq. The archæological researches of recent years appear to be bringing all these types of civilisation into closer contact, and the general similarity of the agricultural conditions is very obvious. The lower Sind valley is very largely river silt, just as Southern Iraq and the Egypt delta are the creation of the rivers there. Very similar systems of embankments and irrigation canals have been forced upon the peoples of all three countries and, when properly looked after, have repaid them with the abundant harvests upon which their ancient civilisations were built up.

The desert East of Hyderabad is at present beyond the reach of the life-giving waters, and is baked hard and dry by endless centuries of Indian summers. Even at 5,000 feet the air currents threw our big machine about in the most disconcerting fashion. I began to think that I had had rather an overdose of deserts—the Sahara, the deserts of Nubia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Arabia, and now the desert of Sind. I felt that there could be few deserts of the Old World which I had not flown over. Longmore observed that I was looking pale, and sought relief himself by taking over for a while from Flight Lieutenant Anderson who was piloting us. Salmond had retired to the observer's cockpit. It would border on treason to inquire for what purpose. There was no similar distraction available for me and, if I was looking pale, which is not admitted, I had reasonable excuse; for Griffiths, the Bristol mechanic who was travelling with us to look after the machine, succumbed with horrible completeness. Fortunately, he had the grace to do so where I could not see him.

Just as we were tossing over a particularly uninviting bit of arid mountain desert, studded with dead-looking trees and bushes, our starboard engine (there is surely a fatality about starboard engines) started missing and coughing. I

passed on a note to Griffiths, who by this time had fully realised the worst, asking what he thought of things. He wrote briefly and hurriedly "Better land." Then to Longmore, who contented himself with prefixing three words to Griffiths' advice, "There is a." However, luckily the starboard engine's paroxysms soon began to mend without assistance from us, and it became unnecessary to put to the proof whether Griffiths or Longmore had the better of the argument.

We continued to roll and bump along till about 4.15 p.m., when Jodhpur came in view and our troubles were forgotten. It was a lovely sight. As we circled round the town preparatory to landing on the aerodrome, there was revealed to us a series of delightful pictures which realised the uttermost of my expectations of the charm of India. A beautiful city, gay with palaces and lakes, with a magnificent old fort of red stone and age-long city walls set with seventy gates. Above the fort, completing the perfect outline of the city, a superb palace built into the living rock.

Later I learned that the present rulers prefer to live in more European and less interesting-looking—though most comfortable—houses outside the city walls. The central palace is handed over to the old Zenana ladies, the widows of

Maharajahs and Princes, who now that Suttee is illegal eke out their lonely lives in rigorous seclusion and complete inactivity. Their fate is at least a degree better than that of their predecessors of not many generations back who, as they left the palace gates on their way to self-immolation on their lord's funeral pyre, turned and pressing their small hands into the soft plaster of the lintel left there imprinted the only memorials of their devotion and self-sacrifice. There is something very pathetic about those tiny imprints, something which goes beyond one's natural abhorrence of the cruel futility of such a custom and touches one's emotions. Year by year the hand-prints have been covered over by successive layers of silver paper; till they have almost lost all semblance of human form and look like the slots of little paws. Yet they stand for an infinity of love, fanaticism and despair.

It is strange that the respect in which Rajputs hold their womenfolk should have been accompanied by such a practice. No doubt it was a survival from some early age, when human sacrifice formed a part of the Hindoo religion. It may perhaps be connected with the similar religious ideas which led the early colonists of Sumer to send both male and female attendants to accompany their dead kings and queens in

the life beyond the grave. Even to-day, as from time to time stories of more or less successfully attempted suttee amply prove, the practice has a deep hold upon the minds of the less educated Hindoos. In days gone by it was carried to truly appalling lengths. It is related that no less than sixty-four females sacrificed themselves upon the pyre of Rajah Ajit Singh, and that when Rajah Budh Singh of Bundi was drowned the number of victims was still larger by a score.

There was a huge crowd of people assembled to see us land. As we glided down on to the aerodrome we found it surrounded by a broad belt of native sightseers kept in bounds by soldiers, and their bright-coloured turbans giving the effect of a massed border of flowers. We were met by the Maharajah's deputy, the British Adviser, representatives of the railway, and a number of courteous and dignified officials. After a perfectly appointed and very welcome tea, we were escorted to a fleet of exquisite pale blue Rolls-Royce cars and taken for a drive round the city. To me it was a revelation of Hindoo life. Everywhere the sacred cow wanders about at will, and apparently sleeps with the family at night. Extraordinary little shrines of Hindoo gods, with globular figures, bulging eyes and covered with silver paper, are seen at odd corners. You get

glimpses into temples and see the strange-looking priests going about their mysterious duties. The roofs of the houses are festooned with pigeons and peacocks, also sacred and as much at home as the pigeons of St. Paul's. The native part of the city is just as it has been for centuries, and is most attractive. There is none of the overlay of Western civilisation which crops up so often in Egypt and Iraq.

The Maharajah was away in England ; but his uncle was our very gracious host, and Hanut Singh our guide. The latter was an old friend of mine whom I was glad to meet again. We had made each other's acquaintance in France during the Great War, when Hanut Singh was in attendance on his father, Sir Pertab Singh, and I was on Sir Douglas Haig's staff. He is a superb horseman and plays a fine game of polo. At the end of our drive we were taken to one of the Maharajah's palaces, where I was shown into a magnificent suite of rooms in a modern building complete with lifts and every other convenience, and left to prepare myself for the State dinner party which had been arranged in honour of our visit. It proved to be a most admirably arranged and imposing function ; though, somewhat to my regret, the dishes were chiefly European. Indian guests and servants alike were splendidly clothed, yet alike in

perfect taste ; the Princes wearing long white coats with jewelled buttons and pale tartan turbans ; the servants all dressed in green and gold with green and gold turbans. It was a charming spectacle and a most interesting and enjoyable evening ; but we had had a more than gruelling day and this was the one occasion during my tour on which I felt at all weary.

Tired though I was, I felt, however, that I had had the good fortune to see a little of a perfect example of the capital city of an Indian State, and to experience Indian hospitality at its best. The Rajputs have a high reputation throughout all India for princely character and soldierly qualities, and the chiefs of Jodhpur take rank with their kindred of Jaipur and Udaipur among the accepted leaders of a distinguished race.

Like many other ancient princely families, the Rathors claim celestial descent. It is not necessary to go back so far to establish for them a respectable antiquity, or to find evidence of ability and romance among the outstanding figures of their long line. Jodhpur has been the seat of government of the province since 1459, when Rao Jodha built and fortified it and transferred the capital there from Mandor. The story goes that after Jodha, then a royal outlaw, had been invited back to Mandor and had contrived to establish himself there, he was



JODHPUR.

advised by an anchorite who lived in a cleft in the rocks on the “Hill of Strife,” or the “Bird’s Nest,” to plant his new city on the isolated and steeply scarped hill where now the old palace stands. He followed the advice and, little realising that water might not be available for his future citadel, built his great walls round the sides of the hill and by accident or design enclosed within them the abode of the anchorite. The latter’s protestations and appeals to be left in peace were disregarded; so the holy man rose in his righteous wrath and declared that sweet water should never be found within the walls. His curse was powerful and efficacious. The deepest wells sunk within the palace precincts yielded at the best only brackish water. It was necessary to contrive means of hauling water up the cliffside from one of the small lakes at its foot, in order to fill the great storage tank which Jodha hewed out for the provisioning of his garrison.

Jodhpur has a long and stirring history as one of the strongholds of Hindooism against the Mahomedan invaders, and has seen many battles and sieges. Though there is a tradition that the citadel has never been captured, the city has certainly been sacked or held to ransom more than once. But the town and its rulers have survived all vicissitudes. The present

ruling family has a splendid record of loyalty during the Mutiny, and of wise and enlightened administration since that date. To-day, despite its wide tracts of desert, it is sufficiently prosperous, the soil being very fertile wherever there is water, and a good export trade is done in the red building stone of which the old fort is constructed and in salt from salt lakes. Lying outside the beaten tourist track, it remains to-day quite unspoiled. I could scarcely have chosen a better starting place for my first introduction to native Indian life.

XIV
CITIES, OLD AND NEW

“Where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her Kings barbaric pearl and gold.”

Milton.

CHAPTER XIV

CITIES, OLD AND NEW

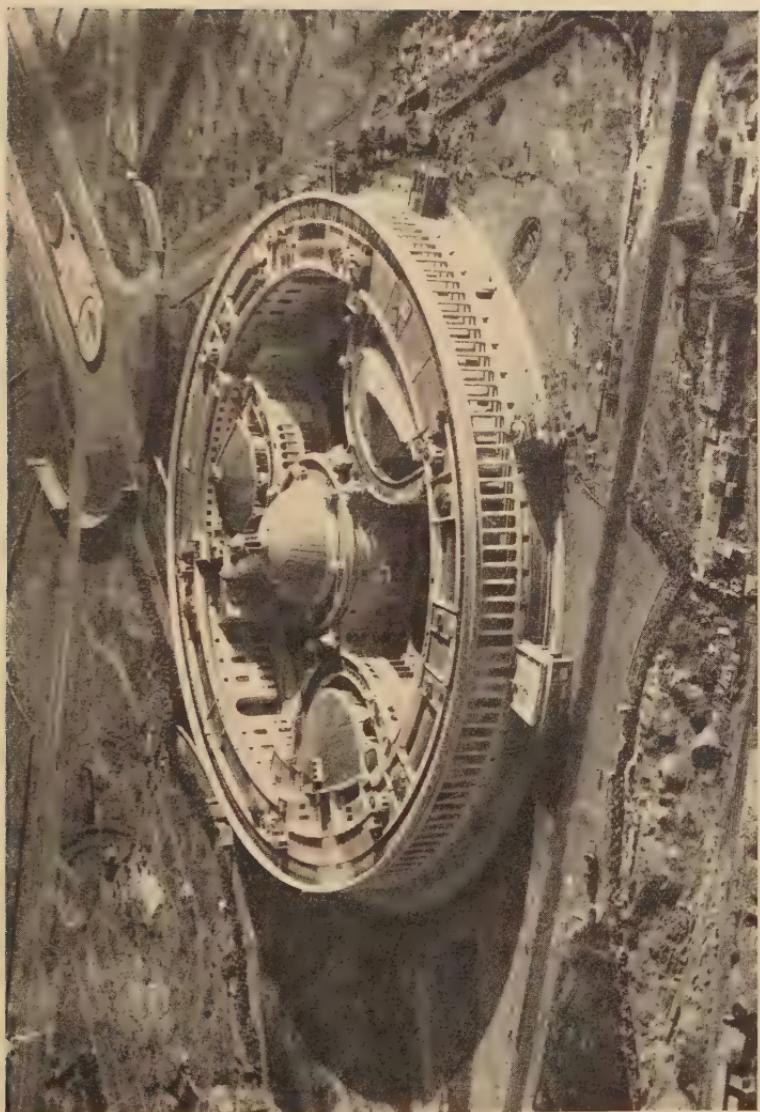
THERE was another great crowd of spectators on the morning of the 17th to watch our formation of four machines take off. Hanut Singh came down to speed us on our way, and I was glad to be able to thank him for a most delightful visit.

It was a calm, fine morning and we got along at a good speed, without any of the bumping and discomfort of the previous day. Places like Babylon and Ur apart, I found India a much more interesting country to fly over than Iraq. There is more, and more varied vegetation; trees and fields with what looked like hedges, and many towns and villages all very neatly laid out. We passed over one or two of the lilac-coloured salt lakes where the people of Jodhpur get their salt, and a small town which I was able to identify as Narnaul.

We were now drawing near to Delhi, where we were to land for lunch. Just before noon the city came in sight, looking enormous. The whole plan and scheme of the new capital were laid out beneath us like a great map. It had

been getting rather bumpy again; but discomfort was forgotten in our excitement at getting our first sight of the new capital from the air. The old capital of the Mogul Empire is on the right bank of the Jumna, with the new city and government buildings some two or three miles to the West. We could follow the circuit of Shah Jahan's great wall and pick out in the northern portion of it the famous Kashmir Gate, which played so large a part in the Mutiny siege. Perched on the East bank of the river the old fort or palace stood out well. Here was once the "Peacock Throne" with its jewelled twin peacocks, their spread tails inlaid with sapphires, rubies, emeralds and pearls. One wondered whether this £6,000,000 bed with its twelve golden pillars is still hidden away in the treasure houses of the new Shah of Persia, or whether it has gone the road of so many other treasures of antiquity.

The old city is set over against the noble halls of the palace across the river, and with its mean and crowded streets clustered round splendid mosques, is in marked contrast with the wide avenues, open spaces and bold lines of the new capital. Yet among the mosques themselves and in some of the monuments and tombs scattered round the outskirts of the city are examples of perfect oriental architecture which



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AT NEW DELHI.

have set a high standard to builders of New Delhi. Within a few miles to the South is the Kutb Minar in which the genius of Mahomedan design and Hindoo art and workmanship are marvellously wedded. It is reputed to be the most perfect tower in the world and one of the seven architectural wonders of India. The new buildings are fine, and their general effect impressive ; but I do not think that either singly or together they have endowed India with an eighth wonder. After six centuries the Kutb Minar stands among the ruins of one of the old cities of Delhi, of which no less than seven can be traced around the neighbourhood of the fort, as beautiful and well-nigh as perfect as on the day on which it was completed.

The new capital is not yet finished, but enough has been done to enable one to obtain a very clear conception of what the whole will one day be. It is undoubtedly well worthy to be a seat of Empire and the centre of the Government of India. An imposing series of buildings is grouped boldly round the colonnades of the Legislative Assembly, the latter a great circular building divided into chambers in which sit the Assembly and Councils. The Vice-Regal Lodge is one of the buildings which still awaits completion, and its empty halls and corridors give an impression of cold vastness which will no

doubt be softened down when it is finished and fully occupied. The peoples of India are admirers of fine architecture, and pomp and pageant have always meant much to them. They will undoubtedly find all three at Delhi.

The R.A.F. Headquarters were still stationed at Simla; but we went over the buildings allotted to them and found them spacious, as all these buildings are, cool and well designed for their purpose. Then on to the club for lunch, where we were entertained on a scale commensurate with the size and magnificence of the new capital—almost too magnificently in view of the probably bumpy journey to Ambala, on which we were to start immediately afterwards.

However, it was not too bumpy to prevent our four machines keeping good station, and we arrived at about tea-time over Ambala in quite creditable order. We were met by Squadron Leader Brooke, commanding No. 28 Squadron, who showed us round the station, sheds, workshops, stores, messes, barrack block, institute, etc. By this time I was beginning to know the usual round pretty well; but it is always interesting to see a new station, and particularly a station in a strange command and country. Ambala is the most easterly of the North-West

Frontier stations, just clear of the foot-hills of the Himalayas and the starting point of my round of the frontier air stations. It is the junction, too, for Simla, and I was now on the eve of my short holiday in that delightful spot.

We dined in the mess and at 10.30 p.m. went off to our train, where we found a comfortable coach awaiting us. It seemed quite strange to be travelling by rail again, and I was a little disappointed at not being able to see Simla from the air. We reached Kalka at about 7 a.m. on the 18th October, and changed into the mountain railway for Simla. Kalka is right up against the foot of the Himalayas. The rest of the journey to Simla is made in a little white motor rail-coach along a track which is all tunnels and hairpin corners, round which the tiny train races at break-neck speed. There are over 100 tunnels between Kalka and Simla. Whether we were late or whether it was simply that the driver did not like the look of us, no sooner had we got out of our train from Ambala at Kalka Station than the motor-train rushed off violently without us, and had to be stopped and brought back from the next station. We never got any explanation from the driver, but no doubt he had his reasons.

The journey from Kalka to Simla is one of

great beauty, and our flight across India had been so rapid that we had had little preparation for it. We sped along, up hill and down, but steadily climbing all the while; upon a track which skirted precipitous descents and wound and twisted round wooded valleys and steep tree-clad mountain sides, as though it did not know the meaning of level ground or of a straight road. Every moment as we climbed into a cooler and moister climate the vegetation became more luxuriant. I made my first close acquaintance with mango trees, and marvelled at the forests of deodars and the variety of conifers and rhododendrons. All the little stations which we passed were gay with cosmos, zinnias and dahlias, and looped up with jasmine. Every moment we got most glorious views across deep, verdant valleys with snow-capped mountains towering in the distance. Then suddenly we would be plunged into the darkness of a tunnel, to emerge in a few moments into dazzling sunlight and to be enchanted with a still more wonderful example of the beauty and majesty of the hills.

On arriving at Simla railway station we changed to yet another form of locomotion, and to me a new one. Only the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and the Governor are entitled to use cars in Simla—the roads are too

narrow and steep for it to be possible for general permission to drive cars to be given without serious risk of constant accidents. Later on we were to be privileged to use one of the Viceroy's cars, but on this occasion we were met by rickshaws which are the general means of communication. If I had to choose between the life of a rickshaw man at Simla and that of a pearl diver in the Persian Gulf, I should be hard put to it to decide which was the less undesirable. I confess that I felt rather uncomfortable at being dragged up those steep hillsides by man power ; but it is the custom of the country, and I believe that those who live there soon get used to the idea.

The Vice-Regal Lodge is on the highest point in Simla, a fine position and a solid-looking house rather reminiscent of a Scottish hydro. It commands on all sides magnificent views of the Himalayas right up to the snow mountains. The interior of the house has been greatly improved by the present Viceroy. In particular, the varnish has been taken off the great wooden hall, which can now be seen in the natural beauty of the timber, and in the dining-room he has put up a very effective frieze consisting of the coats of arms of past holders of his high office.

I was delighted to find the Viceroy looking

so fit and well, notwithstanding that his term of office has so far been no easy one. He and Lady Irwin seemed only too pleased to enlighten me on the many points concerning which my curiosity and my ignorance of Indian conditions prompted me to question them. During the afternoon Lord Irwin and I had a most delightful talk together in the garden on all manner of subjects, not omitting the many strange flowers and trees with which the garden was filled and the troops of wild monkeys which appeared to swarm everywhere. No place seems sacred to the monkeys, but I understand that the monkeys themselves are sacred.

Later I went up to Sir Geoffrey Salmond's house, to have tea with him and to meet his Staff. He lives at the very top of a very steep mountain in a veritable castle. It must be only about one and a half miles from the Vice-Regal Lodge as the crow flies ; but the road winds and turns so much, and goes first up and then down and up again, that it took us three-quarters of an hour to cover the distance. The four magnificent Indians, clad in the scarlet Vice-Regal livery, who drew my rickshaw groaned and puffed, until I felt really unhappy and longed to get out and walk. However, as I had only just been projected 8,000 feet up in a few hours, I reflected that my plight if I did walk would be

far worse than theirs, so I stuck fast. Certainly, I had had plenty of experience of rapid change of altitude ; but, when one rushes up thousands of feet in an aeroplane in the course of a few minutes, one is not called upon to do mountaineering at the end of it. I fear that my rickshaw-men were a little disappointed at my callousness, as I suspect that they groaned a little louder than was strictly necessary in the hope of playing upon the feelings of a new-comer.

Until one has had time to become acclimatised, living at so great a height makes one wonderfully ready for bed. I attempted to play bridge after dinner at Viceregal Lodge, but my low standard of play was quite unable to compete with my high standard of sleepiness. Out of sheer pity for my partners I said an early good night. Longmore was not very successful either. I think they get too much practice at Simla.

After my experience of the past three weeks, getting up to 9 o'clock breakfast was quite a novel experience for me, and produced a delightful feeling of sloth. Lord and Lady Irwin, their daughter Anne and I had our meal out on the balcony looking over the mountains. I ate a mango, but it was too late for it to be at its best, and I regretted that I should have no opportunity to see a mango tree covered with those golden globes of luscious ripeness. The

tree has such a neat appearance, leaf and branch and trunk are so curiously tidy.

This morning I go out shopping with Lady Irwin. I feel a very important person in a car. We have great fun, but I find the shops rather disappointing. The really artistic things must be somewhere else, or the art of making them has been lost. I can find nothing that seems to me to be worthy of the India of my fancies. Shawls, jewellery and all alike bear the stamp of cheapness in everything except their price labels. I conclude that there are too many English in Simla, and wish that I had been able to do a little shopping at Jodhpur.

After lunch we all rode out to a sort of weekend house of the Viceroy's called "Mashobra." It looks like a house at Maidenhead, 8,000 ft. up, with lawns sloping towards Everest instead of to the waters of the Thames. We had tea up there in the sky, and then rode home. It had been an altogether charming day among charming people and glorious surroundings. The Viceroy's Staff could not do too much for our comfort, and one and all put themselves out to be kind to us. With regret I took my leave of my charming hosts and got back to my little white rail-car again at 6.30 p.m., to rattle back to Kalka. The sight of Simla by night, as we rushed away from it towards the plains,

was inexpressibly beautiful—a Valhalla of lights that quite eclipsed the Milky Way.

At Kalka we changed to the broad gauge line again and travelled through the night to Lahore, where we arrived at 7 a.m. We were met by Wing Commander Maclean and representatives of the Governor. We saw quite a lot of the place on our way to breakfast with Sir Geoffrey Montmorency, the Governor of the Punjab, at Government House. I was particularly pleased with the Shalimar Garden, a fine example of the formal Mogul style, full of fountains and lotus pools. The trees, I did not discover their names, had olive-like foliage and were full of pale blue and pale green birds. As usual in such gardens, a water channel, representing the river of life, runs right through the centre from end to end. We saw also Kim's gun, around which he played, so the story of Kim must be true after all.

There is another lovely garden at Government House, but quite in a different style. It has a particularly fine collection of flowering shrubs, and the air was heavy with the scent of the frangipani tree. The Punjab seems to be a splendid place for growing things, an extraordinarily fertile soil and no lack of water. There is a marvellously complete system of irrigation canals which are maintained in good

order, and the area kept under cultivation by this means appears to be more extensive even than in Egypt. No wonder it is one of the most prosperous states in India.

We spent the morning going round the aircraft park, which is under Wing Commander Maclean's command. The park feeds the squadrons up-country and does motor transport body repairs as well. It holds stocks of all types of spares, and is very well and fully equipped and organised. We lunched at the mess, and I was able to get a good deal of information regarding the work done and the requirements of the frontier squadrons. The life of the latter approximates closely to active service conditions, in all except casualties, and the demands made upon the park are considerable.

Directly after lunch we shook the dust of land transport from our shoes and took the air again in the Hinaidi for Peshawar. We now got a really complete idea at first hand of the enormous amount of work that has been done in this part of India in recent years in the way of canalisation and irrigation works generally. If the Egyptians were the masters of irrigation in the old world—and others in Iraq and on the Indus may have run them close for supremacy—the British have undoubtedly carried all before them in more recent times. There is this

striking difference between the old days and the new, that the work performed by us has been chiefly, if not entirely, for the good of other races.

It was a delightful flight. We passed over all five rivers of the Punjab, and the whole country lay like one vast, fruitful garden beneath us. Rawalpindi showed up away to the East, quite a big place. We saw General Nicholson's monument, and flew over the famous Attock Bridge which spans the Indus, carrying the railway to Peshawar and a carriage-way slung beneath. The river here has just left the higher mountains and runs swiftly in a deep channel down a narrow valley through rocky gorges. There is a small detachment of British troops in Akbar's sixteenth-century fort of polished stone over against the bridge. They enjoy fine views ; but the place has lost much of its military importance since the introduction of modern artillery.

We followed the Kabul river up the fertile valley in which lies Peshawar, at the foot of the Hindu Kush, and soon after 5 o'clock made a good landing on the aerodrome. Cars were ready to meet us and take us to Government House, where we were received in most kindly fashion by the Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier, Sir Norman Bolton, and Lady Bolton. I was glad to have time for a rest

and bath before dinner. At dinner I met General Godwin, commanding the troops in the Peshawar District, and what must surely have been a great part of the European population of Peshawar. It was all very jolly; but we turned in early, for we had an early start and a long day before us on the morrow.

XV

GUARDIANS OF THE FRONTIER

“ The fair far snows upon those jagged mountains
That gnaw against the hard blue Afghan sky.”

Garden of Kama.

CHAPTER XV

GUARDIANS OF THE FRONTIER

OCTOBER the 21st, Trafalgar Day, and a very full day, too. In this part of the Empire, at any rate, silver wings must do the work of wooden walls. One should not forget altogether, I suppose, that there are some few soldiers about. None the less, it is the Royal Air Force which is now doing the daily, active part of the keeping of the borders. What a country over which to keep watch and ward! It is a land for eagles, mountain sheep and flying men. Iraq, Transjordan and other Middle Eastern territories strike one as obvious countries for control by air power; because of their level, open spaces, their cloudless skies and, generally, the favourable conditions for flying that prevail there during most of the year. Here flying seems natural for a very different reason; because the whole face of the land is so broken and heaped up, the valleys so deep and the mountains so high, that only on wings can one move about without infinite toil and labour.

It is not good country for flying; but yet

country in which flying is the ideal means of locomotion. As one swings round the shoulders of great mountains and looks down into well-nigh fathomless ravines, one wonders how it was ever possible for European armies with their weighty equipment and long, slow-moving supply trains to fight successful campaigns among such natural obstacles.

I began the day by going round the station at Peshawar, where was No. 20 Squadron under Squadron Leader Nicholas, and was most favourably impressed by the high standard of maintenance which existed in the squadron, down to the last detail. Here, on the wildest frontier of the Empire, there is no knowing at what moment the call for action may come. Everything has to be ready at all times for instant service, and everything is ready. I may say at once that it was the same wherever I went all along the frontier. The small isolated units of a few machines under a junior officer were in the same state of efficiency and preparedness as the central station at Peshawar. Everywhere the admirable condition of the machines was equalled by the keenness and efficiency of the personnel. There is no doubt that the existence of something closely approaching active service conditions gives just that tonic which is needed to get the very best out

KHYBER PASS.



of good material and good organisation and control.

Having gone very thoroughly round the station, we climbed into Bristol Fighters and were taken off for a day's rapid survey of the frontier country and outlying air stations. We flew at 8,000 feet, first up the Khyber Pass and followed the river and railway along a constant succession of stupendous gorges, deep sunk between rock-flanked mountains which reared their lofty heads heaven high on either side. The twin roads and the railway with their well-chosen gradients and many viaducts represent wonderful feats of skilful engineering. We went up as far as Landi Kotal, where we were able to look far across the frontier into Afghanistan, towards Jalalabad, little dreaming of the fate that was soon to overtake that city at the hands of Ali Ahmed Khan Jan and his tribesmen.

Nor could we foresee that within two months or so British airmen and British aeroplanes would be making regular journeys up and down the Kabul River valley, across the 150 miles and more of savage country between Peshawar and Kabul, having changed their rôle of watchers for that of rescuers. I saw enough to be able to realise later very clearly under what extraordinarily difficult conditions the evacuation of

civilians from Kabul has been carried on. It may be good country to fly over in one sense, but it is wicked country on which to make forced landings. Over the whole stretch between Peshawar and Kabul there is scarcely a spot where a machine can be brought to land without extreme risk of disaster, and fewer places still whence a machine once landed could hope to take the air again.

The responsibility of conveying women and children by air across such country, overrun as it has been by wild tribesmen with their instincts for fighting and looting freed from all restraint, has been no light one. For such work to be accomplished day after day without accident demanded most reliable and well-maintained engines and machines, and the coolest and most skilful and intrepid of pilots. Before a start could be made suitable machines had to be brought up to Peshawar. For this purpose big Victorias were despatched from Iraq, and the promptness with which they arrived upon the scene of action is an eloquent tribute to the mobility of the Royal Air Force. The first machine reached Peshawar in four days from Baghdad. Then touch had to be established with Sir Francis Humphrys in the beleaguered British Legation outside Kabul. The first officer sent over in a D.H.9a was shot down over

Kabul, but fortunately was able to make a safe landing on the aerodrome. Practically every other machine that was sent over to reconnoitre and, if possible, establish communication with the Legation was heavily fired at, and more than one was hit.

On the 22nd December, however, King Amanulla's troops succeeded in forcing the rebel tribesmen back for a time from the ridge overlooking the Legation and the aerodrome. A message came through unexpectedly over the wires from Sir Francis Humphrys asking that the evacuation of women and children might commence the following day. It was short notice, but the request was complied with. On the 23rd December three D.H.9's and the Iraq Victoria, with a Wapiti in advance as a scout, were sent over to Kabul and came back safely with a full load of twenty British women and children. Next day twenty-three French and German women and children were brought out. Thence onward the process of evacuation went on steadily, only interrupted temporarily by the wintry weather and snow, until practically all Europeans in Kabul—English, French, Germans, Turks and even Russians, together with Afghans and a great number of British Indian subjects, to a total of nearly 600 souls in all, had been brought back to India and safety.

The whole story comprises a glorious episode indeed in the short, but splendid history of the Royal Air Force.

An incident connected with the evacuation is interesting as illustrating what good results may sometimes flow from small and unpremeditated actions. Some little time before the trouble in Afghanistan came to a head, a Russian aeroplane came down in British territory with engine trouble. I remember that it was quite a feature in the Home Press at the time and there was much discussion anent the activities of Russian spies in India. The two Russians in the machine were taken to Kohat and were there very well looked after by our people, so much so that the Russian Minister at Kabul sent us his thanks for our treatment of them. Our kindly action, although in no way exceptional in character, brought its speedy reward ; for when the time came for the evacuations the Russian Minister and his countrymen in Kabul gave us every assistance in their power.

From Landi Kotal we flew in the course of a few minutes over a great mountain divide to the Kohat Pass. I do not know how long it would not have taken us to have got there by any other means. We inspected the station at Kohat and found No. 60 Squadron in an equal state of readiness and efficiency

to that of its fellow squadron at Peshawar. The station is very well laid out and enjoys all the luxuries of permanent buildings and hangars with fans. We lunched at the mess with Squadron Leader Neville and his officers.

The Kohat Pass is most interesting, and I especially admired Lord Roberts' road and marvelled at the constitutions of the soldiers of his day, who were able to work and fight in such country without solar topees and victualled upon beef and Burgundy out of a cask. I was told that the valley was full of Afridi villages and made out more than one, but saw never a sign of life. An Afridi house is not a very elaborate or conspicuous structure, and the punishment inflicted by the bombing and destruction of a village is nothing like so severe as it sounds in Western ears. When a tribe by its misdeeds calls down upon itself the righteous wrath of the authorities, and it is decided to read it a lesson by bombing its village, ample warning is always given before the bombing starts; in order that the villagers may have time to remove themselves and their goods out of harm's way. That as a penalty the bombing is not unduly harsh is proved by what actually occurred during one of our pre-war punitive expeditions. The column had reached the village of the erring tribesmen and

orders had been given for its destruction. When the soldiers detailed to burn it down started on their work they were actively and enthusiastically assisted by the villagers themselves ! The tribesmen had already taken away everything that they valued, and the chance of helping at a really good bonfire was too good to be missed.

It must not be thought that the risks attending the use of air power for control of the frontier tribes are all on the one side. The warning notices which are dropped prior to the bombing let the tribesmen know beforehand what to expect, supposing that their consciences have not already put them on the alert. They are well prepared, therefore, to open fire on our machines. Many of them nowadays possess modern rifles, and the standard of their marksmanship has so much improved that the chance of a machine being hit is by no means inconsiderable. If a machine is hit in some vital spot, or if anything goes wrong with the engine, the pilot can count himself fortunate if he make a safe landing and get away afterwards. Casualties among the R.A.F. personnel engaged in air operations on the frontier would inevitably be very much heavier than they actually are, were it not for the extremely high standard of maintenance both of machines and engines.

Though punitive expeditions carried out by the Air Force do not last as long as did the old ground expeditions, they may yet take some considerable time before a really obstinate tribe is brought to acknowledge defeat. In such cases a very large amount of flying has to be done over extraordinarily wild and difficult country, with a corresponding risk of forced landings. Among the great mountains are many caves, which have been known to, and from time to time used by the native population since the memory of man. When their villages are bombed the tribes retreat with their goods and chattels to these caves, where there is safe shelter for man and beast. All that the aeroplanes can then do is harass the tribesmen and their flocks and herds when they come out. The work is arduous and unremitting, and the contest resolves itself into a question whether the airmen or the tribesmen can hold out the longer. The tribesmen waste a good deal of ammunition by shooting at the machines. The aeroplanes drop a certain number of bombs, which impress the tribesmen with the necessity of keeping under cover; but very few casualties are incurred on either side. Obviously such a state of things may on occasions continue for quite a long time. Indeed, it has been suggested that in many cases the deadlock would probably

have gone on very much longer than in fact it did, had it not been that the caves were so full of fleas that ultimately even the case-hardened villagers came to consider surrender the lesser evil of the two.

A campaign which can be brought to a successful termination by the ravages of fleas cannot be said to be carried on under conditions of excessive inhumanity. Undoubtedly, an occasional tribesman, who has exposed himself too obviously in his endeavours to shoot down an aeroplane, may get caught by a bomb or a machine gun bullet and killed. Cattle may be found while grazing, and a certain number of them slaughtered. When the operations are over the tribe will have to put in a good deal of extra work in constructing for themselves new and, for a time, more sanitary homes. A machine or two may be damaged or lost, and one or two airmen wounded or killed. Yet compare such a tale of loss and damage with the casualty list and the record of destruction of even a minor and successful ground expedition, and the humanity, effectiveness and economy of air action cannot be gainsaid.

From Kohat we flew over to Risalpur to see Nos. 5 and 27 Squadrons. This two-squadron station covers a good deal of ground, and we had rather a long, hot and dusty walk round

before we had properly inspected everything, including the excellent permanent buildings and hangars. Everyone seemed very happy and contented, and the officers and men with enough work to keep them keen and in good condition. We flew back to Peshawar just as the sun was setting behind the glorious mountains and dined with No. 20 Squadron in their mess. It had been a long but most interesting day and, despite a thorough inspection of four squadrons and three stations, I felt no sense of fatigue.

Peshawar appears to be quite an exciting place in which to live. One is left in no doubt about its being a frontier station, for there is a barbed wire fence all round it and armed guards on duty all night. The native quarter is supposed to be quite a dangerous place for innocent visitors to wander about in, and certainly a good deal of sporadic shooting goes on. Despite the barbed wire and the guards, well-known border ruffians manage to find their way into the city from time to time. Some of them seem to be on quite friendly terms with the local police officers, during such times as they are not actually "wanted" for some offence. From all accounts, some of the mountain tribesmen are extraordinarily expert thieves. They boast that they can steal down from the hills

into Peshawar and take away the sheet from under a sleeping man without waking him. This is apparently effected by a highly scientific process of tickling, the victim being induced to roll over in his sleep until the coveted article is freed from his retaining weight. I have sometimes wondered whether the process is not aided by the sleeper's knowledge that in such circumstances it is much healthier not to wake up.

With the unregenerate Pathan, indeed, thieving and murder are apt to go hand in hand. It is difficult for a European who has not lived long on the frontier to realise in how little regard human life is held by the tribesmen there, and for how small a sum of money it can be purchased. When some wanted murderer is handed over to the authorities by other tribesmen, as happens from time to time, it is often the hope of reward that leads to the betrayal. On the other hand, there are instances on record of captured raiders being released by their frontier guards in return for a couple of rupees. The native instincts of the tribesman, constantly faced as he is with the contrast between his own hard living among the mountains and the comparative wealth and plenty of the plains, lead him irresistibly to raiding, by which he satisfies at once his "sporting" inclinations and his

unceasing appetite for loot. It is by recognising and utilising his natural proclivities, that of late years has been put in practice the most promising method yet devised, apart from the intervention of air power, of checking the frequency of raids; namely, by subsidising certain tribes to forego raiding themselves in favour of fighting raiders. This new field of activity provides the excitement the tribesmen appear to need, and offers the advantage of a regular and certain income in the place of an uncertain and irregular one.

These "Khassadars," as the subsidised tribesmen are called, are, however, a palliative rather than a cure for raiding, and obviously require to be supported by forces of a more reliable character. So long as the policy persists of preserving a neutral zone between the frontier of India proper and the frontiers of the nearest organised States, punitive expeditions will be required from time to time for many years to come; in order to keep the turbulent and lawless inhabitants of no-man's-land within bounds. Until, therefore, the opening up of the country by roads and railways induces a spontaneous change of heart among the tribesmen, or our frontier policy is altered and the neutral zone permanently occupied, the Royal Air Force will be needed to bring erring tribesmen to

book and to prove to those tribes who are already friendly to us that our friendship is worth while.

There must always dwell, too, at the back of the minds of those responsible for the government of India the knowledge that the Khyber Pass, which in the past has so often been the road of invading armies and nations, may one day revert to its historic character ; that one day some later Alexander or Mahmud may seek to make it the gateway to India. If ever that day comes, Peshawar will once again bear the first thrust of the assault and, if the experience of the Rajputs of a thousand years ago is to be reversed, the Royal Air Force must be prepared to play its part, not only in the control of the Frontier, but in its defence.

I was sorry to leave Peshawar and my charming hosts, both because Sir Norman and Lady Bolton had made us so much at home during our brief stay, and because there was so much to see and learn there, and I realised that I had but touched the fringe of it. Before I left India, however, I got another small and amusing glimpse of native Indian character. I was taking final leave of my bearer, who couldn't speak a word of English, when I discovered that he wanted something from me, but for a long time I could not make out what it was. Ultimately,

he produced a bundle of crumpled chits and handed them to me and I realised that he wanted me to give him one myself, so that he could add it to his stock of recommendations. I had the curiosity to pick one out of the bundle and read it. It ran : “— has been my bearer for six days. In that time he has managed to lose three very important letters and all my kit and I strongly recommend no one to take him on.” Poor fellow ! He was quite confident that his chit was a certain passport to employment.

At 10 a.m. on the 21st October we left Peshawar in the Hinaidi on the first stage of our homeward journey. We had an escort of three D.H.9a's, as well as Group Captain Mills in his own machine. We passed by way of Kohat over the Pass and then by way of Kohat Toi, Hangu and Thal to Miramshah, flying high across the hills. At Miramshah we landed to inspect an isolated flight of No. 60 Squadron. The accommodation at this small, advanced station was quite excellent; good, solid brick buildings and hangars and everything as spick and span and in as good order as if under the immediate eye of their Squadron Commander. The station guard is supplied by a body of Tochi volunteer irregulars, under a British major. I met here General Wigram, an old

friend of the Great War days, who had flown over to meet me, and also one Aircraftman Shaw, better known as Colonel Lawrence, with whom I had a long talk. He seemed thoroughly happy in his self-chosen exile and pleased to think that he had got himself taken on for another five years of peaceful and useful obscurity. Alas, he had no inkling of the trouble even then brewing in Afghanistan, which was to drag him away from the Frontier and India, lest his very presence within a short day's flight of revolution should bring doubt upon the good faith of Great Britain.

The landing ground of Miramshah is 3,500 feet up, and the Hinaidi took some getting off. We were lighter by the weight of Sir Geoffrey Salmond, who left us there. I said good-bye to Sir Geoffrey with feelings of very real gratitude for all that he had done to assist me in my tour of India.

Once up, our machine climbed well and we headed south for Quetta across Waziristan, past a fine fort at Jandola, and over country which has the reputation of being the wickedest in India. Somewhat to our surprise it was not bumpy, perhaps because we flew at a height of 11,000 feet along the line of the Zhob Valley to Fort Sandeman, with great mountain peaks rising higher yet on either side of us. We saw

the new road being continued to Wana, and noticed quite a lot of traffic on the Rasmak road. Undoubtedly the roads will change the frontier, if anything can.

After Fort Sandeman, there was little beyond the mountains to attract attention till we came to the light railway at Hindu Bagh, and at our great height we found the journey quite unpleasantly cold. The country hereabouts has been graphically described as “a chaotic jumble of mud-coloured mountains, for all the world like a bewildered herd of Titanic camels.” We were glad to see Quetta lying snug in its big plain with its distant girdle of hills, and to glide down into a warmer climate.

Not that Quetta is really hot, compared with most other parts of India. We stayed the night at Government House with Colonel St. John, the Agent to the Governor-General, and the garden was gay with English flowers and sheltered by great mulberry trees. No. 31 Squadron is stationed at Quetta, and after the usual round we dined at the mess, where I met General Harrington, the G.O.C. in C. Western Command, who had very kindly come to meet me there and to renew old acquaintance. I was naturally delighted to see him, and to find him looking so fit and well. General Humphreys, who commands the Staff College at Quetta, also

came to dinner, so I had plenty of opportunity to supplement the knowledge I had gleaned upon the frontier by authoritative information concerning the larger aspects of our Frontier policy.

Next morning the starboard engine was once more up to its usual tricks, and we were an hour late in starting in consequence. This time the trouble was with the plugs. Luckily the aerodrome is a big one. If it had been Miramshah we should have gone over the edge. We left Quetta in a basin of blue mist, but dawn had laid her rosy fingers on the mountain tops. We soon got back into the heat again, and started shedding superfluous articles of clothing.

The air was very clear and still, and as we passed out into the Sind Desert through the Bolan Pass I thought it the most impressive of all the passes through which I had yet flown. It is so very narrow, with such steep, sheer mountains almost closing in on one. We refuelled at a place called Padidan amid clouds of baking sand and crowds of baked natives. Soon after restarting, we passed over Jacobabad, reputed to be the hottest place in the world, and then over the Indus at the Sukkur Barrage. Huge canals are being thrust out far into the desert, and we could see the giant excavators

busily at work. When completed, this stupendous work will bring many thousands of additional acres into cultivation and, with the works already completed, will constitute an irrigation system without equal. The fertility and prosperity which many centuries ago made the Indus Valley a centre of early civilisation will be brought back.

Hyderabad once more, and then soon after Karachi comes in sight, and we slip down on to the aerodrome, our tour of India finished. We landed just in time for a late lunch, and found that the Commissioner in Sind had returned to Government House from his holiday in Kashmir. The Iris was waiting for us, and we lost no time in seeing Scott. He had changed the defective part in the starboard engine; but had not installed a completely new unit, as the new engine had only arrived the day before and there was no time to do more if we were to stick to our programme. He had given the repaired engine a good test and all seemed O.K. He was less happy about the weather, and prophesied a cyclone from Bombay. I tried to console him, and said that in that case we should be *wafeted* on our way; but he refused to be comforted and said that a cyclone from the South in those latitudes was frequently accompanied by a strong gale from the North!

We dined with the Governor, and were regaled upon a very excellent Pomfret, among other delicacies. I put thoughts of cyclones resolutely behind me and spent a very happy evening ; but the weather did seem very hot and sticky, and the night was full of queer insects.

XVI

A BROKEN JOURNEY

“La peripétie c'est l'âme du voyage.”

Icare—Journal Intime.

CHAPTER XVI

A BROKEN JOURNEY

SCOTT'S promised cyclone failed to materialise, so his meteorological theories were not put to the test. Indeed, so far from there being any cyclone, there was scarcely enough breeze to lift us off the water in our heavily laden condition. We were early on board the Iris, before it was fully light, and took off from the harbour at 7 a.m. on the 24th October in good weather. We had Sir Denys Bray, the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, with us; as he wished to make a quick journey to London to attend a conference and thought that he could save time by accepting a lift from us as far as Basra. We were very glad to have his company; but he was destined to have more of ours than he had bargained for.

Our faces were once more set towards home, and as we swung along the coast of Baluchistan I had leisure to reflect upon the crowded incidents of the past three and a half weeks. I had spent eight days in India and had flown over 2,500 miles, in the course of a complete

circuit of our air stations, which had brought me into close personal contact with the work which the R.A.F. is daily carrying out in that vast country. This most absorbing and enlightening experience had followed close upon the heels of similar inspections of the stations and work of the Royal Air Force units in Egypt, the Sudan, Transjordan, and Iraq ; so that I was able to make comparisons while my recollections were still entirely fresh. All this I had seen and done, and had travelled some 9,000 miles in comfort and without fatigue, when I was still only three weeks and four days out from Plymouth. I felt that it was indeed a wonderful example of the astonishing mobility of air transport.

My meditations were interrupted by the unrestrained emotions of Sir Denys Bray, who was going through the same stages of excitement and delight that I had experienced on my journey across to France. We were travelling at about 3,000 feet and, having left the dust haze behind us, were getting along famously with a strong following wind. Sir Denys was enchanted by the views of sea and mountain, and lost no time in sending off the most enthusiastic wireless message to the Viceroy, to tell him that the Makran coast looked as wonderful from the air as it looked dreadful

from the land. He added that he was most grateful to his Excellency for giving him the opportunity of such an unforgettable experience. He little knew what further experiences were in store for him !

After about four hours of steady flying we came down at Gwadar to refuel. The village is situated on the neck of a curious, hammer-headed promontory with a convenient bay on either side, so that one can almost always get good shelter on one side or the other. The sea was black, oily and evil-smelling. Evidently the submarine volcano was in its usual state of eruption beneath the water. We went on shore to stretch our legs, while the refuelling was in progress. Gwadar has the makings of a very good seaplane port. All that is needed are proper boats for refuelling, etc. Those available at present are small native dugouts of remarkable instability, manned by the most terrible-looking cut-throats.

The whole place consists of a few huts and mud houses, a few palms and a lot of natives of the same unprepossessing type as the boatmen. We sat and exchanged compliments with the Wali, or Governor ; a rather handsome-looking old gentleman in a large yellow-fringed turban. Bray chaffed him for not being on the

beach to welcome us when we arrived, and he said that at the sound of our wings he had fled in terror to the basement !

I watched the endless procession of women to and from the wells, with their water jars effortlessly balanced on their heads. This really rather difficult feat results in an extraordinarily graceful carriage. The long folds of their black draperies, the rhythmic cadence of their movements, the noble leisure of their gait, are as beautiful as anything on a Greek frieze and transmute their humble, necessary task into something infinitely moving, as though one were in the presence of a solemn and mysterious rite.

When we got back to the Iris, we found her surrounded by an extremely varied and unsavoury collection of natives, mostly naked, in every sort and kind of canoe and craft. Some of them tried to catch the dregs of the petrol which dripped from the empty tins. What little they succeeded in collecting they rubbed vigorously over their jetty backs as a cure for rheumatism. They all flashed about the flying-boat in a high state of excitement, maintaining an ear-splitting chatter.

We took off ; the natives became mere specks, and soon Gwadar with its twin bays faded from our sight. The sea was calm and blue,

but with here and there vast areas of it covered with shrimp-coloured foam which I was told was the spawn of certain fish. Fish of all kinds in their multitudes we could see through the still clear water, and occasionally the slim shadow of a shark. We had some lunch on board. Lunch over, I sat next to Scott in the second pilot's seat, Longmore was writing up his log—presumably recording what we had had for lunch—Bray at full length on one of the bunks was making up for his short night. All seemed to be going well, when suddenly a peculiar leak of oil became apparent in the forward part of the starboard engine. Sergeant Cronkshaw, our fitter, said it was most unusual. It could not be a leak in one of the oil tubes (which we could easily have landed to repair), and must mean a serious mechanical fracture. The oil pressure had dropped, but we carried on for about an hour with the starboard engine throttled down. Then it broke down altogether and began to make an appalling noise. It looked as though we should have difficulty in making Jask and might have to come down in the open sea. Scott, however, was determined to carry on. We dropped from 3,000 feet to 200 feet, and contrived to keep going at 71 miles per hour, until we just managed to reach Jask. There is a spit of land which we

had to cross in order to get to the harbour. We slid over it at about fifty feet, skimming past the philosophical noses of a drove of camels, and settled down safely upon the calm waters of the bay. It was a very fine effort on the part of Scott.

There we were again in that accursed place Jask, almost too disgusted to be as thankful as we should have been that we had reached it. There is certainly a hoodoo on the place, as far as aviators are concerned. I notice that Imperial Airways have made Jask a regular stopping-place on the new route to India. I think that they are wise. It is well to bow gracefully to the inevitable.

We landed and were received without surprise and with their usual hospitality by the Superintendent and the other officials of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, and once more took up our quarters in Mr. Thomson's comfortable house. It was soon confirmed that the unfortunate starboard engine was damaged beyond local repair. Something had punched a hole in the crank-case. We immediately telegraphed to Karachi for help, asking for a new engine to be sent and hoping that the Hinaidi would be dispatched to us with it on the following day. There was nothing further to be done, but wait with what patience we

could muster, so Longmore and I went off for another bathe in the warm water of the bay. We kept close in shore again, for bathing on that shark-ridden shore is apt to be exciting as well as pleasant.

There was no knowing how long we might not have to remain at Jask. After our bathe I walked round the promontory again and watched the great billows of the Indian Ocean rolling in out of a calm sea in stately majesty, and renewed my acquaintance with the millions of crabs. Jask must be the capital city of the Kingdom of the Crabs. The weather was lovely and quite cool and the Persian mountains looked their best in the soft evening light. It would have been really enjoyable had we not been so anxious to get on. Heaven knows what will happen to Bray's conference !

We established ourselves again with kind Mr. Thomson, he, Bray, Longmore and I sharing one room and sleeping on the roof. He had prepared an excellent dinner for us, with Persian jasmine arranged in vases on the table ; because he knew that we would *have* to come down there !

Late that night word came from Karachi that the Hinaidi would arrive at Jask next day (Tuesday) to take us on to Iraq; but without the spare engine, which would have

to come by the next available mail boat. The sloop Cyclamen and the Department's cableship were fortunately already in the neighbourhood, so we should have no lack of help.

It soon began to look as though we should need all the help we could get, if we were ever to leave Jask. I discovered next morning at an early hour that Mr. Thomson's chickens had not lost their voices, and they and their rival the muezzin effectually prevented me from oversleeping. I returned from a bathe and a long walk to find that the Persian authorities were still wrestling with our papers and were raising difficulties which promised to be endless. They declared that our passports were not in order, as they were visa'ed only for the journey to India and not for our return. We marvelled at the optimism of the Air Ministry, and that they should have thought to have got rid of us so easily.

For the time being the obtuseness of the Persian local authorities did not greatly matter, for we had no means of leaving if we would ; but when at about lunch-time our salvation arrived from the air, in the shape of the Hinaidi, matters assumed a different aspect. We were overjoyed to see the trusty machine once more and the friendly faces of the pilots Flight Lieut. Anderson and Flying Officer

Fressanges and the crew, and were eager to be off again. I was more concerned for Sir Denys Bray than for myself and felt that, if as a result of our mishap he were to lose his connection at Basra, we should indeed be disgraced. He himself seemed to feel no qualms; but remained delightfully cheerful and undisturbed, the one really cool person amongst us.

Ultimately the trouble about the passports resolved itself into the fact that the words “aller et retour” had defeated the local talent. We did our best to unravel the mystery. Our good friend Mr. Thomson and his assistant Halkett waxed very strong upon the subject. The wires grew hot with telegrams to and from Teheran. By dint of sending cables to all and sundry and much personal explanation of a vigorous nature, we at length persuaded the authorities concerned that there was some virtue in the words “et retour,” and that the object of the British Government in sending us to India was not permanent exile.

Yet, even when this puzzle had been explained, we seemed no nearer starting than we had been. The Cyclamen and the cableship lay at anchor in the bay, where the Iris tossed at her moorings. It was a most impressive sight. Never before had Jask seen moored in her

harbour such an imposing variety of craft at one and the same time ! But the local officials remained unimpressed and refused to give us back our passports. They opposed to all our prayers and objurgations that favourite blank wall of officialdom "They had no instructions." At long last our frantic telegrams produced some effect and a wire came for the Mudir from Teheran telling him to speed us on our way "Sans faire de difficultés." Even so, we went to bed without our passports, for the Mudir declared that he had left them at his office and would not be back there again till 11 o'clock next morning ! We wanted to leave at 5.30 a.m., so as to be able to reach Basra before dark.

However, thirty-six hours at Jask had already imbued us with a fatalism purely oriental, and we decided to conduct ourselves as though we really were going to start at our proper time, and then abide what fate might send. Accordingly Bray and I saw Longmore off into the dark on a rickety bicycle at the head of a string of tiny pack donkeys—the queerest of cavalcades—to spend the night in the desert under the wings of the machine, and we ourselves turned in once more on Mr. Thomson's airy roof. I rose at 3.45 a.m., anticipating the customary matutinal chorus, and shaved

in the dark. It was a process of which I was beginning to get rather weary, as it usually resulted in the removal of more skin than beard. Our baggage had gone out to the Hinaidi over-night on Longmore's cavalcade of donkeys, so Bray and I had only ourselves and a few small personal belongings to transport over the three miles of very mixed going which lay between Mr. Thomson's house and the Hinaidi. With rare optimism Bray and I said our grateful farewells to our kind host and started off in the dark to walk to the machine, stumbling over the sand bunkers which obstructed our way. It was a painful journey and our comments upon Persian roads were more forcible than polite; but I am not quite sure that there ever was a road there, so we may have been unjust. The Mudir, or Director of Customs, had been better than his word and at a late hour had sent us our passports and accorded us permission to leave.

With our passports in our pockets, even if the immediate surroundings of our walk were uncommonly dark and murky, the future wore a more rosy aspect. We came at length upon the Hinaidi and the crew, all ready to start as soon as it was light enough to see. For a moment it seemed as though our troubles were at last ended. They were not. The com-

mander of the local troop, consisting of about twenty-five souls, declared that no orders to permit us to leave had reached him from the Commander-in-Chief at Kerman and that consequently he could not let us go. To add emphasis to his refusal, the Hinaiidi was surrounded by an armed guard.

Dawn broke at 5.30 a.m. to find us disconsolately taking it in turns to sit upon an empty petrol tin, with steadily dwindling hopes of ever seeing home again. The rather ragged-looking guard went to their breakfasts, and Anderson provided us with a little entertainment by starting up the engines and taxi-ing about. The guard sprang to their rifles in a great state of excitement and their obvious relief, when they saw us still sitting on our petrol tin and only the pilot in the machine, was quite ludicrous. Suddenly at 7 a.m. the tall figure of Bray and the shorter silhouette of Halkett, the two plenipotentiaries who had gone to attempt to melt the breast of the O.C. troops, appeared upon the skyline, preceded by the commander's envoy who came to announce that the siege was raised. I did not know why, and thought it best not to inquire. We hastened to leave, lest the permission so suddenly and inexplicably given were as arbitrarily revoked. We stayed not on the order



ESKI—BAGHDAD.

of our going, but bundled into the Hinaidi and took off as quickly as we could.

By this time the sun was quite high, and we rather doubted whether after so much delay we should be able to reach Basra before dark. As we roared away we cast sad glances of commiseration at the poor crippled Iris tossing in the bay, abandoned to the caprices of the O.C. troops. We prayed that she might have fine weather when the new engine came, for changing engines on a rough sea would be a difficult task. It was not until we had got within reach of the next aerodrome at Bandar Abbas that we began to feel safe from the siren spells of Jask.

Fortune at last was on our side again, and at about 1 o'clock we reached Bushire, after a good journey. Being this time in a land machine, we had travelled overland, and the country looked even less inviting than it had done from the sea. The mountains which had appeared so fierce to us, as they snarled at us across a narrow strip of sea on our outward journey, were just as formidable as they lay beneath us; an interminable series of ragged peaks of various heights, most of them looking as though they were crumbling to pieces. Not a tree or a bush was to be seen on them. The brilliant red of the mineral seams gave the

impression of bleeding wounds scarring their gashed sides. Inland over the higher mountains we could see far into Persia towards Shiraz.

Bushire looks very charming from the air at the head of a rather blunt promontory. We landed to refuel and found that the British Resident, Sir Lionel Haworth, had very kindly come down to the landing-ground to take us off for a very excellent lunch. We drove out to his house and, in the short space that our haste allowed us, were able to see that at closer quarters Bushire was all that report had said it was.

We were getting anxious about daylight, and were soon in the air again. The wind that had helped us during the morning had turned and was now blowing against us. We took a short cut over a corner of the Gulf; but even so were so much delayed by the contrary winds that the sun was setting when we reached the wide mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. I had forgotten how far it was up the river from the head of the Gulf to Basra, and by the time we landed at Shaibah it was quite dark. The people at the aerodrome were beginning to light flares for us, and with their aid and by the last dim reflected rays of the departed sun we made a good landing.

It had taken us nine and three-quarter flying hours from Jask to Shaibah, a long and tiring journey; but Sir Denys Bray was just as unruffled and apparently as little fatigued as when we had left Karachi. He behaved as though aerial adventures and misadventures of this kind had happened to him all his life. He would be able after all to get to his conference in time, and that was all that seemed to concern him. I was delighted to think that somehow we had been able to get him to Iraq soon enough for him to catch his connection.

I myself was also more than a little relieved. I felt that we had left our last real difficulties behind at Jask, and that now we had only to wait till the Iris rejoined us before completing our journey according to programme. I spent a very jolly evening at No. 84 Squadron and went to bed filled with the agreeable anticipation of seeing Ur of the Chaldees at close quarters next day.

XVII

THE CRADLE OF CIVILISATION

“ Last peaks of the world beyond all seas,
Well-springs of night and gleams of opened treasure,
The old garden of the sun.”

Sophocles.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CRADLE OF CIVILISATION

OUR enforced wait for the Iris to rejoin us meant that we had more time than we expected to have, or really needed, for the completion of our visits to the Air Force Stations in Iraq. So I was able with a clear conscience to give up a few hours to seeing something of the remains of early civilisations which the industry of Mr. Woolley and others is bringing to the light of day.

Accordingly, on the morning of the 27th I went off in a Wapiti to Ur, where we made a good landing in the desert not far from the Ziggurat. Mr. Woolley met us, and showed us all round the excavations. He gave us a most entralling explanation of all that they had found, and of the wonderful story which the excavations were unveiling of what we must at present reckon to be the earliest civilisation in the world. His party had only just begun digging again, so there were as yet no new treasures for us to see; but the excavations themselves and the outlines of the early temples

and palaces were very interesting, and doubly so when clothed with new life by the vivid explanations of our accomplished guide. The huge artificial mountain of the Ziggurat naturally claimed our first attention. I admired the beautiful brick with which its colossal sides are faced and was able to picture to myself what an imposing sight it must have been when its black, red and gold painted walls and buttresses were crowned by the lofty trees which adorned its terraces, prototypes of those Hanging Gardens of Babylon the fame of which has come down to our own time.

At the very top of the great structure in a little blue temple, where the priests entered to perform their holiest ceremonies and sacrifices, was the inmost shrine of the moon-god Nannar, in which the "entu" or legitimate first wife of the god awaited the coming of her divine lord. This little temple was too small to house alone all the majesty of so great a deity. Accordingly along the outer line of the raised platform, or temenos, from the centre of which the Ziggurat sprang, were a series of other great temples where the priests and the priestesses of the second caste, the lesser wives of the god, had their quarters. Here, too, were the storehouses and factories of the priesthood and their places of justice. To the Ga-Makh,

or Great Storehouse, the countrymen brought their offerings of cattle, sheep and grain, clarified butter, cheeses, wool, oil, pottery and all the various products of their skill, to be carefully checked off and entered by the priests on clay tablets which were stored away among the temple archives. From the lower temple on the temenos the processions of priests and priestesses, bearing the image of the god before the awed gaze of the assembled people, wound their way on feast days up the great staircases and terraces of the Ziggurat to the holy of holies on its summit. To-day the glory of the moon-god's temple is sadly departed. In the sacrificial kitchen we found a jackal curled up asleep in a 5,000-year-old oven.

With painstaking and inspired care the excavators have laid bare the whole outline of many of these outer temples and buildings, so that it is possible to trace out with little risk of error the entire economy of the religious administration of the city. Close beside the great temple of Nannar, which housed his priests and ministers, was the temple of his divine wife Nin-gal; a perfect maze of small rooms and narrow passages into which, in all probability, the general public never entered. Here were the quarters of the Sal-Me priestesses, the women of the god's harem, who were

allowed to bear children and to marry, so long as the earthly fathers of their children were not known. It appears that these ladies owned property of their own and carried on business in their own names, for many contract tablets have been found recording their business transactions and bearing their names. It is certain that they were rich and honoured and that princesses were often to be found among their number.

Next comes the amazing temple which Bur-Sin rebuilt to be "the wonder of the land," and finished splendidly with gold, silver and lapis lazuli. It consisted of two vaulted chambers, the outer probably surmounted by a lofty dome and entered by a huge arched doorway set with mighty doors which were adorned with silver, copper and gold. This was the Hall of Justice, forming the outer room to the inner chamber where stood the statue of Nannar. From the steps of the great hall were read out to the public assembled in the courtyard the decisions of the Courts, which from the manner and place of their delivery carried weight as oracles coming from the moon-god's shrine.

Further along the line of the temenos wall are the remains of a large and massive building of burnt brick which is believed to have been

the palace of Ur-Nammu, the great king who raised Ur from being one of the many semi-independent city states of Sumer and, aided by his no less successful son Dungi, transformed it into the capital of a mighty empire. The remains show that the palace was divided into two sections, the one probably the quarters of the king's ministers and his male retinue, and the other his harem. The one half contains a number of public rooms easily approached by wide entrances ; the other could only be entered by round-about and misleading passages barred by numerous doors.

Beyond the sacred precincts of the temenos the excavations have laid bare many private dwellings. We saw the houses the people lived in in the days of Abraham—who knows, Abraham's own home ! Many of them were beautifully planned and built in two stories round a central courtyard open to the sky. Opposite the entrance lobby, where would stand a jar of water for washing the feet of those who entered, across the brick-paved court was the guest chamber. Another of the ground floor rooms was given over to the kitchen premises, and a third would probably be a small private chapel under the floor of which was the vault where members of the family were buried. A brick and wooden staircase,

beneath which would be a lavatory, led to the covered gallery which gave access to the living-rooms on the upper floor. Lofty arched doors opening upon the courtyard gave light and air to the rooms and tall blank outside walls secured privacy and safety from marauders.

Unfortunately, little remains to indicate how the rooms were furnished; but we know that household vessels were of clay, copper or stone. There were store chests of baked clay or of wood. The more well-to-do had rugs and carpets, and all could boast the rush mats which are made to this day on the pattern of 5,000 years ago. Probably there were low wooden tables with crossed legs, stools and high-backed chairs with rush seats and the beds might have mattresses of string or rush work with head-boards ornamented with figures of birds and flowers. Engravings and the notes and inventories on clay tablets tell us that all these things existed in not uncommon use; but no example of them has yet been found to have survived the centuries.

Sumer has not the dry climate of Egypt, which seems to make the frailest works of man immortal. The country is liable to great floods, and the acids of the soil complete the ruin of what wet and rot has spared. But the baked

clay tablets are well-nigh imperishable, and the patient industry of the scribes of Sumer has left a written record which Egypt cannot rival. They tell a story of a civilisation which is in many respects curiously modern. They set before us a picture of a highly commercialised society, and of a people who had built up a complete system of commercial law.

The basis of their civilisation was religious, and the king governed the country in the name of the gods whose ranks the mightier kings often entered even while they lived. Law and religion would seem to have a natural affinity in ancient civilisations, and it was the priestly lawyers who drew up the written contracts without which the smallest transaction does not seem to have been complete. The importance attached to the written contract in all matters of buying and selling strikes a very modern note.

The priests, too, kept the records of decided cases upon which a well-recognised precedent law was built up, and compiled the various codes of laws which were drawn up from time to time; till many centuries later they were embodied in the famous code of Hammurabi. The law, however, did not depend upon the arbitrary will of the monarch, nor was it the private hunting ground of a privileged class. There

was a well-recognised common law, varied by customary laws; but both common law and custom were well known and the courts of law were open to the public, as they are in England to-day. The punishments of the early Sumerian society were not unduly harsh, and it is curious to find that the privileged classes had their special rights balanced by penalties which for similar offences were heavier in their case than in the case of their social inferiors. The widespread trading activities of the cities of Sumer made it necessary for some system to be devised for financing their operations in distant lands, and the clay tablets prove the existence and general use of letters of credit.

Education was not neglected, and the ability to read and write was not confined to the priests; but was generally enjoyed by the merchant classes as part of their business equipment. Many tablets have been found which correspond with the exercise books of our modern schools, and show the efforts which the school boys of Sumer made 6,000 years ago to fair copy the tasks set them by their tutors. When the pupil had fairly mastered the art of writing upon clay, he was set to mathematics, and learnt to work out and utilise tables of multiplication and division, square and cube roots, and exercises in applied geometry.

Medicine was not highly advanced and the practice of surgery required courage as well as skill ; for if a surgeon operated on the eye of a patient and had the misfortune to deprive him of his sight, his own eye was plucked out with his own lancet ! In the material arts, as in the ideas of law, a much higher standard had been reached. The powers of the early Sumerians in the working of clay, stone and metal were of a high order. They had a very full knowledge of the fluxing, blending and casting of non-ferrous metals and were accustomed to socket axes and adze heads many hundreds of years before the Egyptians had passed the stage of tang and rivet. The potter's wheel had been employed by the Sumerian craftsmen many long years before its introduction into Egypt. The arch which was to be the glory of Western architecture was not known in Europe, till Alexander's returning soldiers brought back the knowledge they had gathered on their campaigns ; but it was understood and was used in Sumer at least as early as 3,500 years before Christ.

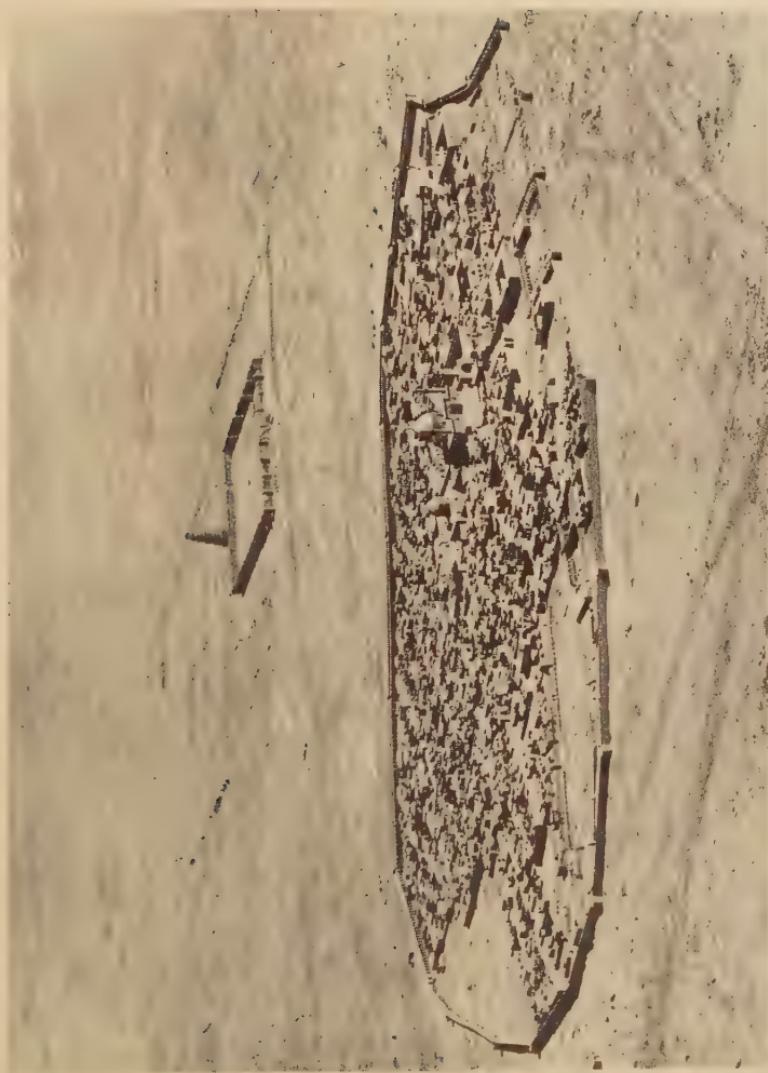
It was indeed an absorbing tale that Mr. Woolley had to tell us, among the labyrinth of ruins whose silent eloquence he has interpreted so well. Long before it was ended, I found myself fully ready to accept his estimate of the

cultural debt which the Western civilisations of our own day have inherited, through the channel of Jewish writings and Greek learning, from those strange early peoples of Sumer who, until some thirty years ago, were forgotten as though they had never been.

Mr. Woolley took me back to lunch at his house which he has built entirely out of very big, thick, 2,600-year-old bricks of the time of Nebuchadnezzar. They make a very sound house, and are admirably in keeping with the work Mr. Woolley is doing. Our talk strayed over wide spaces, from the lessons of his discoveries to his future plans and hopes, and from Sumerian art to the remarkably fine example of a mirage which we had seen that morning from the top of the Ziggurat. Gazing into the desert, one could see "far in advance and far in rear the semblance of refreshing waters"; and not the waters only, but the palm-trees reflected in their surface. It was astonishing to think that what appeared so real was no more than an optical illusion; due to interferences with the normal refractive qualities of the air caused by the same excessive overheating of the desert sand which was responsible for the bumps I had experienced in the machine.

We flew back to Baghdad between the Tigris and the Euphrates. They are amazingly curly

SAMARRA.



rivers, twisting and turning upon themselves along their whole course, which they not infrequently alter, and much more than doubling for water-borne traffic the actual distance between Baghdad and the sea. Looking down at the flat country through which they make their devious ways, much of it still marsh, it is easy to understand how the story of the great Flood established itself among the Sumerians and became a landmark by which to date the dynasties of their early kings. Floods are common enough in lower Mesopotamia to-day. It would only require the unusual, but quite possible concurrence of the different conditions favourable to flooding to produce a disaster of a magnitude amply sufficient for it to stamp itself ineffaceably upon the history and tradition of the inhabitants of the area concerned. There is no reason to doubt that the legend preserved in the Gilgamesh Epic is the poetic account of an actual event which finds record also in the Genesis story.

We circled Baghdad and then landed at Hinaidi, where I found sports in progress, and was immediately seized upon and told to distribute the prizes. The short time that I had been away had made quite a difference to the appearance of the station, for topees had been discarded and the men had gone out of khaki

into the Air Force blue. The autumn rains had begun, and to me fresh back from India the weather seemed as cold as Greenland.

I was once more staying at the Residency with Sir Henry Dobbs, one of the most charming and amusing of men. I had a room overlooking the Tigris which flowed past under my window; so that I could watch the scores and hundreds of boats that drifted by, some painted pale blue, others covered with black pitch and quite round. The latter are the melon boats, and they look as though they had been scooped out of the half of a gigantic specimen of the fruits they carry.

After the incessant hurry of the past four weeks, I found I had rather more time than usual on my hands during the two or three days of enforced stay at Baghdad. The time passed very pleasantly for me owing to the kindness of the High Commissioner who, much busier than I, yet found a few spare hours to sit with me under the chenar tree in the garden and talk of the future problems of Iraq and the immediate problems of gardening. Sir Henry Dobbs, like all people of real discrimination, is a very keen gardener and even at that season, when Iraq is gathering moisture for a new period of growth, his garden was gay with roses and marigolds. Between our talks I

wandered about a little in the bazaars and by-ways of the city and saw the shops full of pomegranates, each fruit bursting with ripeness like a mine of balass rubies.

The weather had broken early, and unkindly ; for it was the great week of Baghdad in which the horse show, racing, polo and sports are held. Of course, I went to the horse show. Horse shows are all very well if one knows some of the horses and knows something about horses. Both those requisites were unfortunately wanting, so far as I was concerned ; added to which, it never stopped raining. I was wearing a tropical suit and no overcoat. The King was there, suitably clad, and also his brother, ex-King Ali of Hedjaz, who talked about boxing ; but even that did not make me feel any warmer.

However, I enjoyed the racing and found it very amusing. The Arabs are very keen and enter very good ponies. Of course, the English started the Race Club—it is the first thing they do anywhere ; but the race meeting is now really an Arab show and most popular. Some of the jockeys look rather quaint ; but they know how to ride. All the big sheikhs come in from the desert for the occasion. There is no doubt that the meeting is a great success and does a lot of good in just those ways which are most

difficult to analyse, but most unmistakable in their effects.

Football and polo have caught on with almost equal vigour, the one as the object of the enthusiasm of the small Arab boys and the other as the sport of the Arab army officers and more well-to-do tribesmen. There is a story current of a local polo team whose leading light had the misfortune to fall foul of the authorities, with the result that he had to pass a period of time in the seclusion of prison walls. The fortunes of the polo club suffered; so an arrangement was come to by which the star performer was allowed out to take part in the matches, after which he dutifully went back to his prison. Sport is a ground on which English and Iraqi meet with common understanding and is a very hopeful feature of their mutual relations.

Before I left Baghdad I went with the High Commissioner to see the King open Parliament. The Chamber is not impressive, which is a pity, for it would be difficult to over-estimate the effect of the stately buildings at Westminster upon the course of proceedings in the British Houses of Parliament. The Iraqi Chamber looks to-day rather like the class-room of a county school, and was originally a maternity hospital. Whether such a building is a suitable *mise en scène* for the birth of a constitution may be

questioned and in time, no doubt, it will be replaced by a structure of a more dignified character. The deputies, as might be expected, presented a rather varied appearance ; sheikhs in their Arab dress mingling with others in European clothes. Some wore the emerald turban of the Seyyid, which denotes descent from the Prophet ; others the high-crowned forage cap that the King has popularised.

The King himself looked very well indeed in native costume ; a long black and gold robe with a curved gold dagger thrust into his belt and a white and gold head-dress. He read out his speech in beautiful tones—low, but very distinct—and carried himself with the greatest dignity.

Another hour was spent in visiting Khadimain, whose golden domes had impressed me so much when I arrived in Iraq after my long desert flight from Cairo. This most magnificent and holy mosque is set in the meanest and most squalid of villages. The contrast is effective ; but the mosque is quite fine enough to stand on its own merits and would be a splendid spectacle in any surroundings.

The mosque contains the tombs of the seventh and ninth Imams, and draws its importance in the Shiah world from the sanctity with which they are regarded. Of its seven doorways, the

East gate is perhaps the finest and gives a good view of the great court, which is often crowded with devout Shiah pilgrims. All, however, are beautiful with rich tiles, on which are enamelled the graceful shapes of flowers, and with mother-of-pearl and glass inlay; the whole guiding one's eye in an ordered riot of colour to the slender minarets and the golden dome flashing in the sun above. Across the courtyard, half hidden from profane eyes, can be glimpsed the holy of holies screened behind green railings.

One turns from its glorious wealth of line and detail to the sightless, scrofulous cripples and beggars clustered at the gates, to the thronged alleys full of little shops and chattering, chaffering buyers, the piles of fruit and vegetables, mountains of grain, bales of coloured stuffs, spices and ointments.

“And the rich goods from near and far
Hang for sale in the Bazaar.”

The air is heavy with the frying of sweetmeats and the hot, musty-sweet smell of Oriental cooking, with the sickly odours of oils and unguents, of Arab humanity and of the East.

XVIII

MOSUL

“All those clothes of gold and of silk which we call muslins are of the manufacture of Mosul, and all the great merchants termed Mos-sulini, who convey spices and drugs, in large quantities, from one country to another, are from this province.”

Marco Polo ; 1254-1324.

CHAPTER XVIII

MOSUL

IT was part of my original programme that on my way back through Iraq I should fly to Mosul to visit No. 6 Squadron, and see something of the frontier country which had been the subject of our boundary disputes with Turkey. On this occasion Longmore abandoned me and I set off alone on the 30th October in a D.H.9a, leaving him to enjoy the society of old war-time friends of his in Iraq; among them Colonel Prescott, who commands the Iraqi police, a fine body of 8,000 men with an excellent reputation for fairness and efficiency. Of the old war-time Levies, only two Assyrian battalions remain; two companies of them providing the guard at Hinaidi, and the remainder doing duty on the frontier North-East of Mosul.

Our course took us across the remains of the Median Wall, which in the days of Baghdad's greatness stretched from the Tigris to the Euphrates and barred the way to the city from the North. On the Tigris close to the eastern end of the wall is Samarra, a little walled town rather like a miniature Najaf; but cleaner and more open. Samarra, too, has a golden domed

mosque and twin minarets bright with Persian tiles. The tenth and eleventh Imams are buried here and here the twelfth and last Imam, a boy of twelve, is said to have disappeared ; destined to reappear, as devout Shi'ites believe, as the Mahdi or Messiah at the last triumph of Islam.

One can see the dome shining in the sun many miles away, gleaming above the protecting walls of the little town ; but the real interest of the place when seen from the air lies outside the walls. Samarra is built upon the site of a vastly larger and older city, that of Esaki-Baghdad which Mo'tasim, the eighth of the Abbasid Caliphs, built to be his new capital, in order to avoid the quarrels between his Turkish bodyguard and the citizens of Baghdad. The new city spread for a distance of twenty-five miles along the river, and was planned with a skill and magnificence which made it worthy of its name “Rejoiced is he who sees it.” The cause of its founding, however, contained the seeds of its destruction and of the final overthrow of the Abbasid dynasty ; for the power of the Turkish guard grew, until it overshadowed and finally overthrew that of its nominal masters. To-day little can be seen of the ninth-century city, until one views it from the air. From a height of a few thousand feet the whole design and plan can be seen in almost

perfect detail. It is a strange and remarkable experience to look down, as it were, through the soil itself and trace the outline of the houses and courtyards, the great avenues worthy of a modern garden city, the racecourse, gardens, palaces and mosques. It is like gazing down through a veil of water at some sub-aqueous phenomenon.

We reached Mosul in time for lunch. It is a charming place, full of interest and surrounded by green hills ; an oasis compared with the rest of Iraq at this time of year. The squadron are very happy there. The city which inherited the art of the Sumerian weavers and by its trade with Aleppo and Venice made Mosulin, or Muslin, known all the world over is still a trading centre of some importance and of recent years has advanced greatly in prosperity. It is a fine, clean town with good houses and wide main streets which are lit by electric light. The Turks hacked a great avenue right through the centre of the place, a drastic proceeding which has certainly added greatly to the ease with which one gets about. All the houses are built of marble or white limestone, the storks nest on the domes of the mosques and the pistachio nut fruits in the orchards. Outside the town, beyond the bridge built by Alexander, the camels of the endless caravans lie down to rest.

The population is a strange mixture of races and creeds, Kurds, Chaldæans, Assyrians, Yezidis and Bedouins; Moslems, Sunnis and Shi'ites, Christians, Jews and Devil-worshippers. All are brought together by the common bond of trade, and there appears to be much less religious animosity than in many other Eastern cities of mixed population. Mosques and Chal-dæan churches draw together their worshippers without conflict. The good feeling in the town is native and is not the recent creation of the Pax Britannica. No doubt, the wonderful fertility of the soil, the influence of trade and the general cheapness of living are the responsible causes.

After lunching at the squadron mess I went for a flight towards the North, to get an idea of the mountain country. I admired once more the curious appearance which these Eastern cities, with their flat-roofed houses and high-walled courtyards, present from the air; just like a welter of square boxes, some with their lids on and some with them off. At Mosul, with its white stone buildings, this peculiar effect was particularly noticeable.

Just across the river from Mosul, at the eastern end of its bridge of boats, lie the ruins of Nineveh, the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire. From the air little is to be seen but

a vast, shapeless mound. Excavators would give much to get busy upon it; for they know that early libraries lie buried there, waiting to be discovered and to add their store of learning to our new-found knowledge of the ancient peoples of the Land of the Two Rivers. A certain amount of excavation has been done, and a 3,000 year-old nude statue of a goddess, possibly of Ishtar, has been recovered from a royal palace ; but upon the summit of the most interesting mound stands the mosque of Nebi Yunus. This is a peculiarly holy spot to Moslem and local Christian alike, as being the supposed sepulchre of the Prophet Jonah, so it is taboo to excavators. There is good reason to suppose that, actually, the tomb which the mosque so religiously protects is not only not that of Jonah, but is that of an early Christian Bishop ! So the famous libraries of Esarhaddon and maybe others must wait still longer to see once more the light of day ; till a way can be found to overcome the scruples of the local believers in the story that Jonah is buried there.

The hill country North of Nineveh towards Amadia soon becomes very wild and picturesque, true frontier country. We passed over a number of villages inhabited by the Devil-worshippers, or Yezidis. I was given to understand that they are a much maligned people, being really quite

mild-mannered ; and their peculiar religion nothing more terrible than a sincere respect for Satan, whose name they will not pronounce, and the eschewing of lettuce, fish and haricot beans. In one respect at least it compares well with Mahomedanism ; for though a Yezidi may take four wives, as may a Moslem, he may not divorce them. Marriage is indissoluble, except by death.

Much more troublesome than the unfortunate followers of Shaitan were recently the various types of "bad men" who infested the frontier country and preyed upon traders and peaceful residents alike. Marco Polo's comment on the Kurds, Nestorian Christians and Moslems alike, is that "they are all an unprincipled people whose occupation is to rob the merchants." Until the advent of the British, highway robbery with violence appears to have been an old and established local custom, rather than a profession. Ingrained habits are notoriously difficult to eradicate, and the difficulty of dealing with offenders in this area was increased by the ease with which they were able to slip to and fro across the frontier. The Kurdish troubles in Turkish territory, too, had their repercussions on the Iraqi side of the border ; for neither armed bands nor refugees paid much attention to the delimited line.

MOSUL, WITH NINEVEH IN FOREGROUND.

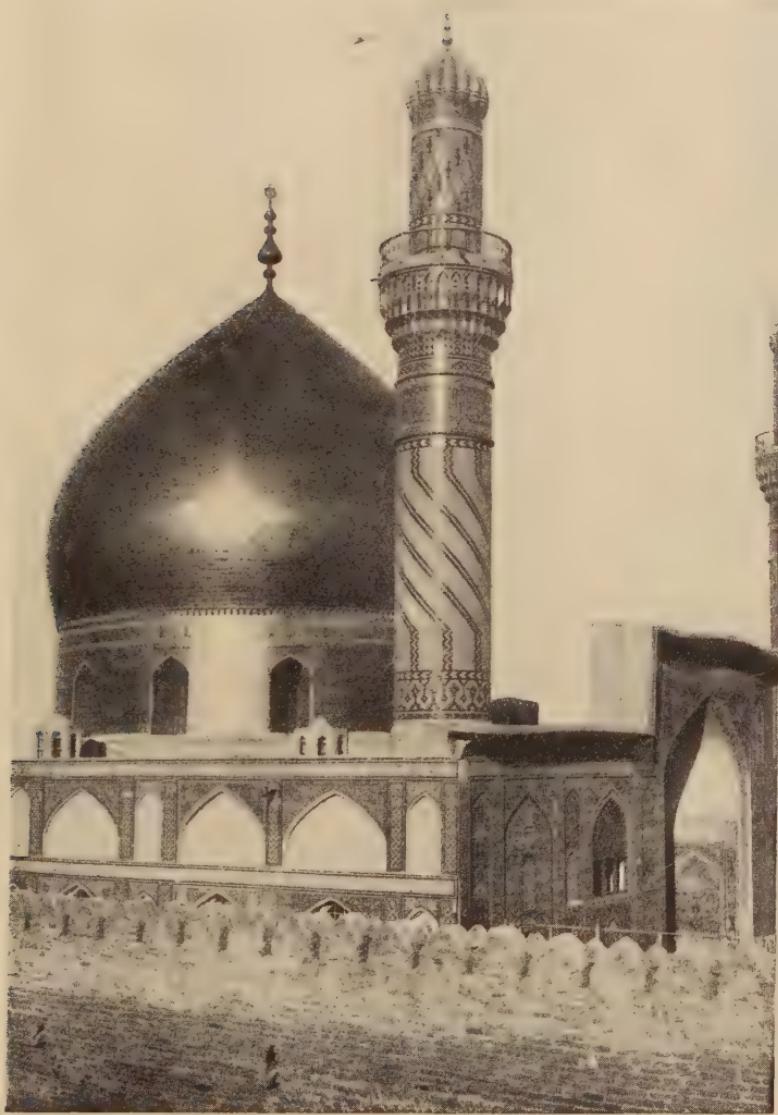


The policing of the frontier, therefore, presented from the start almost as awkward a problem as the larger one of the North-West Frontier of India; and the type of country is but little less inhospitable to patrol, either on foot or from the air. Yet the certain fact is that to-day the border country is quiet and safe. Murders and robberies have definitely ceased to pay. The Kurds have turned over a new leaf and are settling down into well-behaved, peaceable folk. Though No. 6 Squadron, the local Iraqi police and the companies of Levies have still plenty to occupy their time—it is just as well that the arm of the law should still manifest its presence—the new era of peace and order which has come so quickly into existence, and the contentment and growing prosperity of the Mosul district generally, are eloquent testimony to the adequate and efficient manner in which the policing of the area has been and is being carried out.

My short flight over the frontier country completed, we set our course South for Baghdad and soon flew into bad weather, first dust storm and then rain storm. None the less, over Erbil we came down low, so that I might see the strangest as well as the oldest inhabited city in the world. A flattish pie rising out of the plain, the top entirely encircled by a wall within

which the houses are so closely crammed together that it seemed as though one could not put a pin between them. This pie, which looks like a little natural table-land, is actually an artificial hill formed by the super-imposition one upon another in succeeding ages of seven older cities. Erbil was an age-old city when Alexander the Great crossed the Tigris, on the occasion of the lunar eclipse of 20th September, 331 B.C., to overthrow Darius and his Persian host in the battle to which the city gave its name. It has seen the invasions of Greeks, Romans, Mongols and Turks in historical times, and saw wars and rebellions in the days of the Assyrians. There is no reason to believe that its yet earlier days were more peaceful, and the wonder is that men have clung so long to a site which has so often been destroyed and are content to dwell in a city which has so often been the scene of massacre and ruin.

From Erbil we had a long flight back across the Lesser Zab and over the Jebel Hamrin, till we came a second time in sight of Samarra and saw beneath us once more the gossamer tracery of Eski-Baghdad. As we passed on I craned back in the cockpit of the machine and watched the shining flanks of Samarra's golden dome long after all else had faded out of sight.



SAMARRA—THE GOLDEN DOME.

We got back to Baghdad and to a soft English day of mist and rain, to hear that the Iris had not been able to leave Jask for Henjam owing to a water leak in the starboard engine ! However, I had no time to speculate further upon the unkind fate which seemed to dog that unfortunate power unit, for we had to go off to dine with King Faisal. I had the honour of sitting next to him, and was able to continue, in the light of the further experience I had since gained, the conversation I had had with him on my outward journey.

A better account of the Iris came next morning. The leak had not proved a serious matter, she had duly reached Henjam, and was en route for Basra. I felt that we had at last completely exorcised the spell of Jask, and that I could now look forward happily and confidently to the conclusion of my trip. Not even the fact that I had caught a cold at the horse show, and that the wireless refused to function on account of atmospherics, so that we were not able to get any weather reports, could damp my rising spirits. Interested as I had been in all that I had seen and heard in Iraq, Parliament was on the eve of opening and I was anxious to get back. It was good news indeed to hear that the Iris was due at Baghdad on the morrow, on

her way North along the Euphrates to Alexandretta once again, and so over sea to Egypt. The weather looked very bad ; but the main thing was that we were to leave at dawn in the Hinaidi for Cairo.

XIX

MALTA AND HOME

“ But not in silence pass Calypso’s isles,
The sister tenants of the middle deep ;
There for the weary still a haven smiles.”

CHAPTER XIX

MALTA AND HOME

AT 5.15 a.m. on the 2nd November, having said farewell to Sir Henry Dobbs overnight, we left the Residency in pitch darkness and started on the long, wet drive to the aerodrome. The weather was still thoroughly bad, and there was still no possibility of getting a weather report to tell us what conditions we were likely to meet with on our journey West.

We got off in the Hinaidi at about 6 a.m. in low cloud, rain and mist; not at all the sort of weather for the desert route, where there was every likelihood of meeting with real disaster if we failed to keep the track. Before we had even reached the Euphrates we had completely lost our way, and found ourselves flying so low that we were almost grazing the heads of the occasional shepherds over whose flocks we passed. By great good fortune we struck the railway to Ramadi, which gave us our bearings, and Anderson very wisely decided that it was not good enough to go on. We managed to crawl back to Hinaidi, where we waited with

what patience we could muster and tried again for weather reports. Conditions improved very little; but at about 9.15 a.m. we started off once more. The clouds were certainly a bit higher, and this time we succeeded in getting some seventy miles on our way, as far as Ramadi, before we were compelled to squat again. No. 45 Squadron used to be stationed there, and we amused ourselves in looking at their crest of a flying camel which is frescoed over the walls of some pathetically ruinous buildings. Somehow, in spite of the good work done by R.A.F. "Camels" during the war, the true ship of the desert does not seem to be designed for wings.

Another two hours' wait and at last the weather began to get a bit clearer to windward. So we staggered on again. I think that we were all equally anxious to get ahead with our journey, and we were eager to seize the smallest chance of making ground. We were able to fly a little higher this time, and to get a longer view. The desert motor track was all wet and sodden with surface water and we could imagine the cars having strenuous times getting themselves bogged and unbogged. A little later in the season, and the drying soil would have been gay with violet colchicums which "make the desert blossom like the rose." We had lost so much

time that it was hopeless to think of getting right through to Amman before nightfall. We were really rather lucky to get so far as Rutbah Wells, a post in the middle of the desert, where we could spend the night in reasonable comfort and obtain fuel for our morrow's journey.

There is quite a handsome fort at Rutbah with fine thick walls. It looks as if it had been taken straight out of "Beau Geste." The place is an important port of call on the desert car route, and there are some quite passable bedrooms and a restaurant. It is run partly by Nairn and partly by Imperial Airways and is looked after by a detachment of Iraqi police and camelry, in case the desert tribes take a fancy for free meals. We should have been very happy there for the night, had it not been that a Nairn motor convoy turned up in the evening and made sleep impossible. The whole night long people were yelling and arguing and banging one bit of metal against another, to a running *obligato* of bursting tyres, backfires and motor horns and an undercurrent of constant jabbering. There could not have been more noise if the wild men from the desert had turned up.

The weather looked very bad again next morning, and atmospherics again made it impossible to get much in the way of a weather report. However, we did at last receive a

message through from Amman to say “Low drifting clouds at 2,000 feet”! This did not sound very “low” and was quite good enough for us. The weather soon cleared and, although over a part of the route we had great difficulty in following the track owing to the widespread floods, so that at one time we found ourselves heading for Damascus, elsewhere the track showed up well. In secret, I was half sorry that we had discovered our mistake and rather wished that we had been able to see that pearl-white city in its emerald groves.

However, business came before pleasure, and we got back without much loss of time to our proper line; flying low, so as to get out of the way of head winds, and managed to reach Cairo in one hop. We took a course this time South of Jerusalem, so as to save an hour or so, and crossed the Dead Sea at the promontory of El Lisan. So we got a much better view of this strange, lifeless sheet of water sunk between sombre, sinister-looking hills. The colour of its heavy, impregnated waters varies widely, according to whether they are gloomy with the shadow of the black mountains of Moab, which frown above them to the East, or are lit by the reflection of the white limestone hills of Judea. Here the funereal waters are a deep indigo blue, almost black, and here a milky

opalescent colour, curious and unhealthy. Seen vertically from above, the abysmal gulf-like aspect of the sea is emphasised, as though the earth had gaped and spewed it up. The still, barren shores strewn with driftwood which has been brought down by the rivers in flood time and bleached white by the chemical action of the sea, till they look like the dead bones of giants, the entire absence of any vestige of green, except where the Jordan empties its sweet waters, all give an impression of stifling heat and noisome vapours, which is fully justified in fact. No organic creatures live or can live in this sea which refuses even to receive them. The fish brought down by the Jordan are cast up dead and mummified on the beaches close to the river's mouth. No birds seek a living along its bad-smelling shores, or venture willingly to fly over it. The incautious tourist who, in search of experiences and of a tale to tell when he gets home, attempts to dive into its waters is likely to break his neck and, if he escapes that fate, finds his body supported almost completely out of the water, his legs kicking in the air.

The Dead Sea is curious, but not nice. The cities of the plain must have been very evil. It does not look as if it was worth five hundred million pounds, even in chemicals. Yet I sup-

pose that some day science will take a hand in it. Great evaporating pans will be constructed along the shores. The intense sun-heat concentrated by the steep, surrounding hills will be used to drive off the water from the pans, and the resultant chemical residuum will be turned into fertilisers. The Dead Sea will be made to bring new stores of life to crop-exhausted fields.

We left the strange sea with its legends of past wickedness and its possibilities of future good behind us, and flying over the dark woods which clothe the hills of Edom came to Beersheba, a prim little town laid out in straight and formal lines, just as King John laid out Winchelsea or Baron Haussmann the modern Paris. I was once more torn by regrets. If we had kept still farther to the South, a detour of a mere 100 miles or so—one gets large ideas of space when one travels by air—would have taken us over the ruins of Petra, between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akaba, one of the most extraordinary rock fortresses in the world and one which I have always wished to see. To have seen it from the air, however, without being able to land and visit it on foot, would in this instance have been very tantalising; for it is a place which calls for close examination. So perhaps it was well that we kept on over the bare Judean hills, which in a few short months,

when the autumn rains had done their kindly work, would be covered with a crimson mantle of anemones, the true "lily of the field," till we came at last to the Mediterranean. It was quite nice to see some sea without sharks in it.

We landed for a few minutes in a snow-white salt pan at Romani, just short of the Suez Canal, to look at our petrol supply, found both tanks good for another three hours or more—I *might* have seen Petra—and then went on to Cairo. We had done the long journey from Rutbah in nine hours' continuous flight and, when we landed at Cairo at what was 4.45 p.m. according to our watches—3.45 Cairo time—had still enough petrol left for one and a half hours' flight. The Jupiter VIII's had jogged along in fine style and it was with real regret that we said good-bye to the reliable aeroplane which had carried us so well.

We had Sunday to ourselves, for the Iris was not due to arrive till Monday, the 5th November. Even after she had got the new engine going, with the assistance of our old friend the "Crocus," misfortune had followed her; for she had run into a sandstorm at Abadan and had had to land quickly and stay the night. Then at Baghdad she had met fog on her way to Lake Habbania and had been forced to

return and lose more time. When at last she had refuelled at Habbania and started on her journey to Alexandretta, she had found more low cloud over the Euphrates. However, she had had it clear for the mountain crossing ; but it was evident that the Alexandretta-Basra stage would be a stiffish proposition for big flying boats, till better arrangements were made for reliable weather reports all along the route.

The Cairo season had obviously begun, for Shepheards was open ; but there was not really much else to suggest it. I went to the museum again, and after my experience in Iraq, where so much brings back to one the warm life of the ancient peoples, found it still more chill and sombre than on my outward journey. There is something inexpressibly dreary and mournful about this solely funerary art. However, our short stay was pleasant enough. The weather was deliciously cool and sunny and I was again struck by the greenness and freshness of everything, particularly after the dusty oleanders of Baghdad. Opposite my window in the hotel there was a bombax tree, elegant and soaring ; it looked from a distance as though it were covered with apple blossom. In the Zoo the dakomas were all in flower and peopled by troops of hoopoes and song-birds. The animals looked fit and cheery, especially the

lions and tigers. The great cats have not got that sad and mopy look which they assume in less temperate climates, and do not pad up and down in their cages like convicts in their cells.

The Cairo Zoo used to be the garden of some prince's harem. You can still see the quaint garden seats of the original fair occupiers, the rustic bridges bridging nothing, the shell arbours hung with bells, and the mosaic paths. Alligators, and pelicans with their inlaid bills, now throng the lawns which the veiled beauties trod.

We went to see a game of pelota after dinner and were constrained to admit that it takes high rank among racquet games. The players seem to reach a very high standard of skill, and apparently often die young, as it is so exhausting. We met the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Sibour on their way out to China in a Gipsy Moth. It made my tour in a great three-engined machine seem rather tame. They appeared to take their very sporting effort quite in the ordinary course of things.

On the 5th November I went to bathe at Mahdi, a suburb of Cairo on the way to Helwan. It is a charming garden city, consisting of houses belonging to Europeans. I had forgotten that it was Guy Fawke's Day, and got quite a shock

when I came unawares upon a comatose figure reclining in an easy chair. Wing Commander Sowry, with whom I had tea, was responsible for the guy, and very realistic it looked. Later it was to be carried in procession and solemnly burnt in the desert. No one can say that we are backward in keeping up tradition, or that we allow anniversaries to lapse. A small girl who was there was moved to tears at the doom awaiting the poor guy, but was speedily consoled on hearing that it was to meet its fate in the open ! Heaven only knows what the natives thought of our proceedings.

Tuesday recalled me to more serious things and my final inspection in Egypt. I flew over to Aboukir and I went round the aircraft depot, the lay-out of which is rather scattered. The best feature is the air-screw shop. While at lunch in the mess, the magnificent orchestration of three Rolls-Royce Condors running perfectly breaks on our delighted ears and the Iris skims down to a perfect landing on Aboukir Bay. Inside the fuselage she was hung with fruit, as though she had been looting Covent Garden: presents and purchases from Alexandretta—oranges, grapes, dates, pomegranates—a regular harvest festival.

I got a bathe in a clear, warm sea below the ruins of Canopus and then went back to our

hotel at Ramleh, where we were staying the night. Ramleh is another quite charming place, with bougainvillea and bignonia frothing over the walls of the houses and poinsettia trees in the gardens. We had a lovely drive back to Aboukir next morning in the cold, pink dawn, with here and there a Moslem motionless in prayer. All was ready for us on board the Iris. We got off well and turned over Alexandria, obtaining a good view of the King's magnificent palace which looks on to the harbour and out to sea.

There followed as far as Sollum a somewhat dull flight along a flat desert littoral, arid and scored with great fissures which stretch far inland. We came down into the rather exposed harbour to refuel, and we were shown round by the Egyptian police officer who took us in his Ford to the aerodrome behind the fort at the top of the hill. It is not a good aerodrome and is full of rocks. Between Sollum and Benghazi the coast of Italian Cyrenaica can boast some quite respectable hills, some of them well wooded and fertile, and the country, though still largely composed of red-cracked desert and rocks, once supported a considerable population and is studded with interesting ruins. Italian colonists are gradually restoring the prosperity which Cyrene and her

sister cities once enjoyed ; before the sinking of the coastline drowned the natural harbours of the district and, combined with the lawless proclivities of the nomad inhabitants of the interior, destroyed its importance as a trading centre. The country has still far to go before it regains the wealth of its earlier days. In the nine hours of continuous flying from Aboukir to Benghazi, we saw little or nothing to break the scene of utter desolation which the ruined cities emphasised—a sea without a sail, a coast without a human being and scarce a human habitation. But it was the clearest sea I ever saw ; so much so, that we hesitated to alight in the harbour at Benghazi ; it looked too shallow.

Benghazi is going ahead fast. It is a mixture of Venetian and Arab in style ; pink palaces and palm trees. It is a very romantic looking place. There are a number of fine new houses, masses of soldiers, and an aerodrome at which six squadrons are stationed. It affords a good example of the progressive policy of Mussolini. We stayed there for the night, and dined with the Governor in his splendid palace on the water's edge.

As we were taxi-ing out of the harbour at about 8 a.m. next morning, a great red ship came steaming in, its decks packed with a



ERBIL.

cargo of camels *en échelon*—a very pleasing sight, shading from fawn to darkest brown. The long rows of camels' necks were quietly sawing the air like the prows of ships, and all the philosophy and patience of the world was in their owners' eyes. Appearances are deceptive, for when it comes to riding a camel a vindictive obstinacy is usually its most prominent characteristic.

We circled over the Governor's pink Venetian palace to wave farewell to our kind host of the previous night, and then headed straight across the Mediterranean to Malta, which we sighted after about five and a half hours' flying.

Malta is a curious and impressive sight from the air, and Valetta well sustains the boast of its founder la Valette, that he had created "a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen." On either side of its rocky promontory, tight-packed with houses, lie narrow, deep water harbours, crowded with great battle-ships and cruisers, and swarming with tiny rowing-boats painted every conceivable colour. The country is almost treeless and full of stone walls everywhere, like the Heythrop hunting country, and of goats whose milk people are now forbidden to drink, as it is supposed to carry Maltese fever. Everywhere fine old stone-built houses, big churches and mighty fortifications recall the

days of the Knights of Malta and the stormy history of the island. The native population are, naturally, a very Catholic community and festivals and feast days form a great part of their life. The cathedral is built in a very distinctive style of its own. The inside walls are of carved stone, gilt and worn to a lovely colour by time. All the different countries from which the Knights of Malta came have their separate chapels with their distinctive emblems.

I went round the seaplane station at Calafrana and then on to the San Antonio Palace where I was to stay with the Governor, Sir John Ducane, another old friend of Great War days. San Antonio is one of the old fortified palaces of the Knights outside the capital. Its orange groves are famous for the size of their fruits and the abundance of their harvests. A certain number of their oranges are sent every year to the King. The gardens of the palace are beautiful and even at this time of year were gay with daturas, hibiscus crimson and white, and solanum. The trees were laced with the bright blue morning glory, *Ipomaea cærulea*. Sir John is a very keen and skilful gardener and he and Lady Ducane have made the place very charming. Certainly, Malta favours the gardener, and wild flowers, too, are very plentiful, though all of them are very small ; midget crocuses, iris and

hyacinths, and in the spring small, scented lilies growing right down to the edge of the surf; all fit for the garden of a doll's house.

I spent a complete day at Malta and visited the Hal Far aerodrome, where I saw the Fleet Air Arm flights ashore from the aircraft carriers. We lunched in the mess there, and I then went to see some members of the Government who wanted to discuss with me their problems of civil aviation. Later I went round the aircraft carriers, Courageous and Eagle. They are huge vessels, so large above the water that they seemed to dwarf even the Queen Elizabeth. I met and had an interesting talk with Admiral Field, the C.-in-C. of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Next morning, the 10th November, the Governor and Lady Ducane came down to Calafrana Harbour to see us off.

“Adieu the joys of sweet Valette,
Adieu Sirocco, Sun and Sweat.”

The couplet is a libel. I felt that I was saying good-bye to fine weather, and I was right. We took off just before 10 a.m., and five minutes after we had started ran into a frightful storm and squall. We tried to work round it, first North-East, then South, then North-West. Nothing was any good, and after an hour and a

half's buffeting we were nearer Africa than Sicily. We at last wormed our way round the worst of it, and found ourselves to the South of Malta; so we landed to refuel and take stock of the situation.

At 1 o'clock the weather still looked bad; but I thought that, if we did not take off immediately, we should not only stand no chance of reaching Naples that night, but might be marooned at Malta for many days. The eruption of Mount Etna seemed to be playing havoc with the meteorological conditions. I also thought that, even if we did not reach Naples, we could always come down in some cove on the coast of Italy for the night and that this might be a useful experience. So we started, and this time found that we had a strong wind behind us.

We made good progress and shot past Syracuse and its sinister old quarries, past Taormina with its delightfully-sited Greek temple, and through the Straits of Messina at a great pace. Etna was in full eruption, a great cloud of steam and smoke shot with the glow of fires round its middle and burning villages at its foot; but the top showing fairly clear and covered with snow. It is a mighty mountain, and its immense size seemed to dwarf the whole island. Soon we were passing Stromboli

MOUNT ERNA IN RECENT ERUPTION.



again, where we skirted some bad storms; so that the wireless operator, Thompson, had to reel in his aerial, as he was getting such a din in the receiver and there was a danger of being struck. Then through the storm we caught sight of the black, crouching shape of Capri, no longer the fairy island, forty miles ahead of us. The coast of Italy was hidden in the murk and we were getting near the end of daylight. We landed at Nisida with about ten minutes of light to spare, to find that the people at the seaplane station had given up all hope of our coming. Our Air Attaché, Group Captain Bradley, had gone back to Naples and the pontoon with our oil and fuel had also packed up and departed. So we had a long and rather cold wait, till they had collected everything again.

We made a very early start next morning, almost before it was light, in the hope of reaching Hourtin in one stage. It seemed that we might manage it; for to commence with there was a good following wind and we got to Ostia in record time. The seaplane base there was all flooded; but the machines looked very snug, each in its little stable carved out of the river bank. We turned towards Corsica, and the wind turned too and blew venomously in our faces; till the rugged outlines of the island

seemed to hang suspended in the sky always as far off as ever, like a mirage or, to change the simile, like the carrot before the donkey's nose. We got past in time, to find the coast of France blanketed in haze, the long bastion of the Alps stretching white with newly fallen snow above the mist.

When at last we got to Lake Berre, it was far too late to think of pushing on against so strong a wind for the long lap over land ; so we came down for the night there and shivered with the unaccustomed cold.

Crossing France next morning, the Pyrenees with their new coat of snow looked marvellous in the sun—an endless, white, crenellated wall stretching from sea to sea. What a change in the look of the country had taken place in the six weeks I had been away ! Snow on the mountains, and the cubist *marqueterie* of the fields all brown with newly turned plough-land, or russet with the leaves of the harvested vineyards. We landed at Lake Hourtin to refuel again, and found the place alive with small seaplanes glancing about like dragonflies in the sun.

Baron Rothschild had very kindly invited us to stay the night at Château Lafitte. We drove there through the vineyards, amid a riot of autumn colours beneath a sky pale blue and pink, like a debutante's dress. In



VALETTA.

the garden of the Château the tall magnolia trees were hung with heavy, ripening seed pods.

The 13th November, and our last day's flight ! It was misty at Hourtin, and not a ripple or a breath of wind to help us off the glassy surface of the lake. Our propellers blew the mist about in great swirls and the mud rose in huge, black, inky pools where we touched the bottom ; but we got off and were soon roaring along towards home. We had patches of fog and rain all the way, and off Ushant the weather became so bad and we were obliged to fly so low that we had to reel in our aerial again. Past Ushant we had the wind behind us and conditions improved somewhat, with reports from Cattewater and Calshot of better weather ahead. We kept on up the Channel, till I could see Guernsey a long way off. It seemed to me to be nearly under water ; but when we got closer I realised that what I had taken for floods were acres and acres of tomato houses. The whole island is just one huge market garden. I had expected to find something quite different, fawn-coloured cows, nose deep in wild flowers.

The sun was shining as we raced past the Needles and up the Solent to Calshot. A bright and friendly welcome home.

XX

SOME REFLECTIONS

“The earth seems to me a sterile promontory;
This most excellent canopy the Air. . . .”

CHAPTER XX

SOME REFLECTIONS

WE had travelled many miles, seen many countries, met many people, and gained many new experiences. Looking back, it was difficult to believe that we could have done so much in little more than six weeks. Yet we had not been record breaking, or anything like it. It had been a practical, business tour and the 17,000 miles which I had flown had been accomplished, in most cases, in quite comfortable stages. For that very reason the tour is a much better indication of the possibilities of air travel than it would have been had we been attempting to break records.

From my personal point of view, if I may be forgiven for referring to it, the tour had been a most valuable education for me in my duties as Under Secretary of State for Air. My regret is that it was not taken much earlier in my period of office. I feel, too, that I am justified in thinking that it was not without its uses from the point of view of the overseas air stations themselves. If I formed a correct

appreciation of the feelings with which my visits were regarded by the personnel of the stations, the presence among them of one of the political chiefs of their Service was welcomed and did good; as being evidence of a practical interest in their daily life and work.

I know that everywhere I went I was received with real kindness by all the officers I met. All were equally willing, and indeed eager, to show me everything they could, and to help me to realise the detail of their duties. I need hardly say that so happy an atmosphere added enormously to the pleasure of my tour, and to its usefulness to myself.

Tours of this kind are not likely to become of very frequent occurrence. There is no need for that, nor is there the time. There is too much for one to do in Whitehall and among our stations at home. Yet that they should at intervals be undertaken by one or other of those responsible to Parliament for the administration of the Royal Air Force is, I venture to think, eminently desirable. The whole Empire is the Air Service's field of operations. The responsible political heads of the Department must obviously be more likely to view their duties in proper proportion, and to understand the inner meaning of the problems that come before them for solution, if they have a first-

hand acquaintance with conditions overseas and have seen something for themselves of the areas over which the Air Force has to operate.

It is no small advantage, too, to have had personal experience of the mobility of Air Power, and to possess something more than a theoretical knowledge of the probable application and effect of the decisions taken at home. The same desire for personal investigation is showing itself in other Departments of the State which have to deal with the overseas portions of the Empire, now that the improvement of Empire communications has brought the means to gratify it. It would be somewhat anomalous if the Service which offers the greatest facilities for such investigations were not to avail itself regularly of its opportunities.

So much for the Departmental and Service aspects of my tour. It will have been realised by all who have done me the honour of wading through this book that there was inevitably and automatically another side to it. It has been my deliberate purpose to emphasise that other side; for my object in writing this personal account has been to endeavour to popularise flying.

There is nothing more delightfully satisfying, when one can fairly and properly do it, than to combine business with pleasure. I found it

quite impossible to avoid doing so at any and every stage of my tour. Longmore and the officers of the overseas Commands saw to it that I did not neglect the business part. The pleasurable part of it leapt at me from every side. I never had a dull minute, not even at Jask. Not an hour passed which did not bring something new or strange, beautiful or intriguing, to my notice. Before I had been in the air for a day, I had fully made up my mind that there could be no more delightful mode of travel. My readers must not pay too much attention to my accounts of occasional bumpy flights. My course was determined by considerations other than those of comfort; but the passenger air services which will follow "The Third Route" will plan the times and stages of their flights so as to minister as far as possible to the comfort and convenience of their passengers, as well as to their safety and speed of transit. It will not be necessary to fly over *quite* so many deserts as I did and, after all, even if one does happen to find the motion rather trying at times, flying has this great advantage over sea travel, that one knows that in the course of a few hours one will get back to terra firma and be able to recover one's peace of mind and body.

No one who is prepared to face a sea journey

need hesitate to travel by air on account of airsickness. It is quite possible that in the air even the bad sailor will not be affected at all. He certainly will not suffer worse, and he will suffer for a far shorter space of time. Nor need danger act as a deterrent. All forms of locomotion are to-day attended by some degree of risk. Travel by air is the only form of which the risks are steadily and rapidly declining. The reliability of the modern British aeroplane and engine is now so great that the risks of a forced landing in civil flying, even in a single-engined machine, if machine and engine are properly looked after and the distances flown are reasonable, are already small. When three-engined machines are employed with a similar care for proper maintenance and avoidance of unduly long stages, the risk, as the experience of Imperial Airways has shown, is almost infinitesimal. That great undertaking has since January, 1925, flown 3,500,000 miles without the death or serious injury of a single passenger.

There is an immense future before the big multi-engined flying boat in the development of air communications within the Empire. Their air-worthiness is established, and a very considerable degree of seaworthiness has already been attained. Precisely how high a degree of

seaworthiness they possess cannot yet be stated with complete certainty. It is probably higher than they are officially given credit for ; certainly enough to ensure in the great majority of cases that help will come in time, if a big flying boat is forced down at sea. They are unquestionably the most comfortable of flying craft yet devised, though the airship will doubtless soon take the palm from them in that respect. They are roomy and steady, and less noisy than aeroplanes. The engines are so far above the fuselage that much of their noise is dispersed. One will never get rid of noise entirely, till a sound-proof fuselage is invented ; if such a thing be possible.

We have by no means reached the limit in the size, power and sea- and air-worthiness of flying boats, but we have got far enough for it to be unnecessary for anyone to wait for further improvements before taking a cruise in one. I do not think that there are many who, having made the experiment, will regret it. The steady growth in the traffic carried by Imperial Airways and other companies between London and the Continent shows that an increasing public is discovering the advantages which the speed and safety of big, passenger, overland flying machines afford. In the development of the air routes of the Empire, overland machines and



THE IRIS HOME AGAIN.

flying boats will be used in combination and will be supplemented in due course by airships. One of those routes is already open and others will follow ; till the whole Empire is linked together by a network of air lines.

No doubt the first passengers to use The Third Route will either be those pressed for time or the frankly adventurous ; but that stage will soon pass. Before many more years are gone long-distance air travel will stand on its own merits, as by far the most enjoyable method of seeing the world. I should like to think that by putting my own experiences on paper I have helped a very little to bring that time nearer. *Turpe mihi abire domo vacuumque redire.* Yet I have written this book, not so much because I am moved to persuade others to share an experience which gave me so much pleasure, but because I realise the supreme importance of air power to the British Empire, and that air power can only be enjoyed by an air-minded nation. We have got the best machines in the world, the best engines and the best pilots. We have got the greatest need of all nations for air communications. We ought also to be the greatest nation of air travellers.

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I cannot conclude this account without putting

on record my deep appreciation of the kindness and consideration of that most amiable of companions and guides and most accomplished and experienced airman, Air Commodore Longmore. From my own private point of view I know that both the success and the pleasure of my tour were very largely due to his ever-ready information and advice and never-failing cheerfulness and good temper.

My very grateful thanks are due also to Squadron Leader Scott and Flight Lieutenant Martin and the other members of the crew of the Iris, as well as to Flight Lieutenants Gayford and Anderson, Flying Officer Fressanges and to the pilots and crews of the Hinaidi and other machines which carried me in Egypt, Iraq and India, for the care which they took for my comfort and safety. I can honestly say that at all times and on all occasions I felt perfect confidence in the skill and competence of each and every one of them.

Finally, I owe a word of most sincere and respectful thanks to the Governments and Flying Services of France, Italy and Greece, and to the Government of Persia for facilitating my passage over their respective countries and for the many acts of hospitality I received within their borders; and also and not least to the Viceroy of India and to those other distinguished

officers and public servants of my own country who were my most kind and considerate hosts at the various stopping places of my tour, and to the officers of the stations and units I visited for all that they did to assist me in my work.

If my tour has done nothing else, it has given me a new understanding of and respect for the work of the Royal Air Force overseas.

Vasco da Gama 1497.
Suez Canal Route 1869.
Air Route.



Vasco da Gama 1497.
Suez Canal Route 1869:
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